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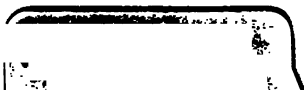
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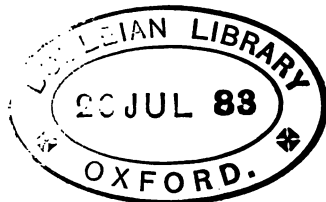
# A FOOL FOR HIS PAINS.

BY  
HELENA GULLIFER,

AUTHOR OF "TRUST HER NOT," ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.



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# A FOOL FOR HIS PAINS.



## CHAPTER I.

A WAGER.

"Is he dead?" gasped Flora Tremayne, her white face turned imploringly to the crowd, as she sat on the pavement in Regent Street, with her brother's fair head on her lap. It was a startling position for a young lady; but her personal identity at the moment was so entirely merged in that of her fainting brother, that she bore without a blush the wondering gaze of the throng, and addressed her question to any kind stranger who would be good enough to answer it.

There were plenty ready to do so, for it was in the early days of May, when London throws off the gravity of winter for the frivolity of spring, and her streets are so thronged with pleasure-seekers that the crossings become a constant nightmare to the nervous. Concerts

were in full swing ; timid young *débutantes* were singing their first songs to exhausted audiences in stifling halls ; carriages were passing in rapid succession ; and the numerous pedestrians, brought to a standstill before the windows of Messrs. Baker and Crisp's well-known establishment, overflowed under the horses' heads in the roadway.

"By Jove, what a lovely face!" exclaimed Sir Philip Trevellyan, as, stopped short by the crowd, he craned his neck forward to discover its cause. "I wonder who she is?"

His companion, a tall man, with good looks enough for woman's conquest, and sufficient resolution for her subjection, without waiting to answer, elbowed his way to the front, and, hat in hand, asked respectfully if he could render any assistance.

"Only tell me that he isn't dead!" and the beautiful eager eyes were raised to his.

Stooping down, he put his hand hastily under the boy's waistcoat ; and, after a scrutinizing glance at his pallid cheeks and closed lids, said reassuringly, "There is no cause for alarm. Take him home. He will be all right after a dose of sal volatile."

The victoria, lying in a broken condition by the kerbstone, with the coachman fully engaged in examining the knees of a fiery chestnut, told

its own tale, with the exception of unimportant details. The horse had bolted; the young lady had been thrown out with the boy underneath her; and, terrified at his insensibility, she had lost her presence of mind. Before Basil Fitzherbert's welcome reassurance, she seemed content to wait there till he woke.

"Will you allow me to call a cab?" he asked, in his most deferential tone. It galled him inexpressibly to see her, in all her beauty and refinement, exposed to the pitiless stare of butchers and bakers, actors, costermongers, dandies, and fools.

The colour rushed into her delicately rounded cheeks, as she accepted with thanks. Relieved from her anxiety on her brother's account, she was free to feel some shyness on her own, and with eyes glued to the searching pavement, she wished it would open and swallow her up.

Sir Philip, who had been distanced by his friend, now seized the opportunity of his absence to adopt his *rôle* of protector to the fair. Placing himself before the brother and sister, he surveyed the crowd with a "touch-them-if-you-dare" expression in his eyes, his small light moustache and tiny whiskers bristling aggressively.

"I will protect you; you need have no fear," he said, with the air of a modern Bayard,



as he kept off a dirty little boy with his fragile cane. But in another moment his chivalrous services were no longer needed, for the other man returned with a cab.

It was Basil Fitz-herbert who did the hard work, helped the boy on to his legs, and supported him to the cab; but it was Sir Philip who handed in his lovely sister and won the guerdon of a smile. Like many diplomatists, he was not averse to obtaining a reward for himself which was due to the exertions of others.

All further offers of assistance being declined, the cab drove off. The coachman of the victoria, in a despairing frame of mind, began to contemplate the necessity of removing both the injured carriage and the horse that had caused all the injury to their stables. The crowd dispersed lingeringly, as if expecting some fresh incident to occur; and the two friends, once more arm-in-arm, resumed their interrupted stroll.

"Who is she?" said Sir Philip, whose eyes at the time were roaming after a pretty little dressmaker, with a large parcel under her arm.

"Some poor drudge doomed to work herself to death for other women's whims."

"A drudge driving in a victoria, in a costume after the latest fashion, with a gold chain as thick as my finger, a face like a Clyte,

and a voice like a—like a——” He stopped, at a loss for a simile. “What on earth are you thinking of?”

“Of that girl over there, whom you were staring out of countenance. I thought you were talking of her.”

“Pshaw! My dear fellow, do we ever? We may give them a thought if they are pretty, but they are not worth a word.”

“I don’t know so much about that,” laughed Fitz-herbert. “The subject might be as interesting as any other. They were the heroines of a hundred old-fashioned novels, and gave a freshness to the story, which is generally wanting in hackneyed effusions which are always drumming on at the peerage. The society-novel of the present day must be full of the upper ten, in order to go down with the million.”

“Horror of my youth! It sounds like a sum.”

“And there is a sum, if you only look at it. The upper ten divide the million into ten thousand different threads of interest, and the million return the compliment, by adding as many of themselves as they can to the upper ten.”

“Which accounts for the absurd number of new lords when the last Government went out.

A peerage is so dirt cheap, that I should be ashamed to accept one."

"I'm so sorry for the peers"—with a sarcastic smile.

"None of your chaff. You may want a handle to your own name before long; for it has a powerful effect with the women."

"If I can't get a wife without it, I shall be a bachelor to the end of my days. I fancy I could if I would, though," he added, with a confident smile.

"Beauty, my dear boy, has the best of it at the first glance, but in the long run it is likely to lose. Adonis says, 'Look at me, and love me.' The plain fellow sighs, 'I look at *you*, and love *you*.' Which is the most adapted to go to a woman's heart?"

"But you needn't be a conceited fool because you are decent to look at;" and Fitzherbert laughed as they turned down Waterloo Place.

"Not of necessity, but the averages are all that way. Plain men, having nothing else to rely on, turn their mental capacities to the best account."

"Humph! I don't know if the tongue comes under the head of a mental capacity; but I do know that you fancy it your strongest point."

"Yes, the 'tongue of the charmer' is a

useful commodity. Now, look here, Fitz ; I lay you a wager. We make the acquaintance of a woman on the same day. Carry it on with constant attentions, matrimonial or not, as the fancy takes us, and at the end of a twelvemonth see which stands first in her favour. I bet you five to one on myself."

"Done," laughed the other. "Who's the woman?"

"That girl whom we saw to-day will do as well as any other. She looks thoroughbred, every inch of her ; and even supposing her face to be her fortune, the prize might be worth the having."

"That speech doesn't sound like you."

"No? You never knew me before in love at first sight."

"Not in your line, nor in mine either ; we leave that sort of thing to the schoolboys. When are we to make Miss Tremayne's acquaintance?"

"Miss Tremayne?" Up went Sir Philip's eyebrows in surprise. "How the deuce did you get hold of her name?"

"I discoursed the coachman, whilst you interviewed the bobby."

"I only rowed him for a moment, because he was no more use in keeping the crowd off than a dummy. But Tremayne's a good name.

I knew a Tremayne in South America, a good-looking fellow, uncommonly free with his cash. Shouldn't be surprised if he were this girl's father; and, at least, I can swear I thought so. I can tell you who is sure to know—Lady Flutterly. She is as good as a book of 'Who's who,' and a deal more amusing. Where are you off to?"

"To look up Egerton, in St. James's Street."

"Then ta-ta; I am bound to see Westmacott at the F.O."

With a nod, the two friends parted, one turning down Pall Mall, the other bending his steps towards St. George's Column.

## CHAPTER II.

### PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

“ I SAY, Flo, I wish to Heaven we could cut it ; old ‘ Spiteful’s ’ temper makes life under her claw worse than penal servitude ; ” and Charlie Tremayne threw himself down on an uncomfortable sofa with the hugest groan of discontent. “ What a lark it would be for us both to be missing one morning, when she came down already for a scold ! ”

“ We shouldn’t laugh long out in the streets, with empty pockets and nothing to eat,” said Flora, lifting her beautiful eyes with quiet gravity. Equal to any amount of madness on her own account, she tried to look as steady as a lord chief justice when appealed to by her brother.

“ *You* wouldn’t cry very long if Fitz-herbert happened to be passing that way.”

A flood of crimson suffused her cheeks as she bent her dainty head over a drawing which she was trying to finish.

"Look here, Charlie, if you go on with any more of your nonsense, I won't listen to you."

"Nonsense, is it? I never talked greater sense in my life. Why did he take me to the theatre last night? Why did he ask me to breakfast with him next Monday, eh?" he asked, with the usual quick-wittedness of the boys of the present day.

"Because he is very good-natured; and he knew you must be dull in this hateful house."

"Hateful, is it?" said Charlie, quickly, as he pulled the ears of a favourite colly. "So you've let the cat out of the bag at last, have you? It puzzled me no end when you pretended to have a fancy for it."

"I have heard that it is wise to stroke the hand which spreads your bread and butter;" and she looked up with a smile, half sad, half bitter.

"Not when it's bread and scrape. It deserves a jolly good slap, and, so sure as I live, it shall get it."

"Nonsense, Charlie; what should we have done without it?"

"A thundering deal better," he said, with a boy's unreasoning decision. "Here you are, no better than a 'companion;' and much worse, in fact, for the old screw thinks she can get anything out of you, because you are a relation, without the expense of a brass farthing to herself."

"You are unjust." Her lip curled. "She lodges, feeds, and clothes us."

"Yes, board and lodging, such as it is—a garret and a mutton-bone. As to clothing, look at my shirt-sleeves, with a fine fringe all along the edge!"

"She gave me a new dress only yesterday," she said with a sigh. "I wish it had been something that would do for you."

"As for me, I don't think she would care if my coat were all out at elbows, and my knees coming through my trousers; but *you* are a profitable speculation, whom she intends to marry to some high-topping swell. See if she don't."

"I wish you wouldn't be always talking of my marrying. I am sick to death of the subject."

"Look here, Flo." In sudden eagerness he raised himself on his elbow, and looked straight into her troubled face. "If a real 'out-and-outer' pops, you won't say 'No,' will you?"

"Most likely. What should I do with a man whom I didn't care for?"

"Then you would deserve to be whipped, that's all;" and he flung himself back on the hard cushion, with the petulance of undeveloped manhood.

There was a pause, during which her pencil made a few unsteady lines.

"You wouldn't like me to, Charlie, would



you?" and she looked up at him with wistful eyes, that were fain to be blind to the cross selfishness of her only brother.

"Shouldn't I, just! when it is our only chance of getting out of this detestable hole. Think what a lark it would be for me if you married the lord chancellor, and he gave me a nice little berth, with a thousand a year on the spot."

"He has got a wife already, which would be a difficulty."

"I dare say there are numbers of other men who would do as well, though, and be uncommonly useful to an impecunious brother-in-law. Trevellyan, for instance. They say he has lots of tin; and it would be quite a romantic ending, after that 'pick-me-up' business in Regent Street."

"It was Mr. Fitz-herbert who picked you up, fetched a cab, and helped you into it," she said quickly, but without looking up.

"Good thing for me that I had a pretty sister, or I might have been lying there yet. It was Sir Philip who came the next day, with Lady Flutterly, and asked if you had dropped a locket. Sly dog; I believe he had bought it on the way, to give an excuse for the call."

"How are you going to find out about this examination?" she inquired, with a sudden change of the subject.

A look of annoyance crossed the boy's features. "Hang the exam.! What's the use of bothering about it? I should never pass it. Do you think all the stuff that they crammed into my head at Eton was glued there, so that it couldn't get out?"

"But, Charlie, what is to become of you if you won't work?"

"As if I could do any mortal good by working alone. Let them send me to Christchurch, where my father was before me, and I will promise to do my best."

"Say 'to the moon;' it would be just as practicable."

"But not as practical. I always feel sure that we have been grossly cheated. Why didn't they sell Broadlands, and give us the money?"

"It could not be sold till you came of age, and by papa's will you don't do that till five and twenty; so it was let for five hundred a year, and four-fifths of the rent secured to the creditors. I believe it was out of charity"—her cheek flushed—"that even that poor little fifth was given to us, to save us from absolute starvation. If Aunt Jemima had not stepped forward and offered us a home, I don't know what would have become of us. Our other relations blamed poor papa for our beggary, as if he would not have given the last drop of his blood

for his children. His imprudence—I suppose it came to that,” she said regretfully—“left us without a roof to our heads, and they let us be—because the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children.”

“Never mind; Flo, don’t take it to heart. When we are up at the top of the tree we will give them as good again.” A boyish form of consolation, which would have cheered her more if the top of the mythical tree had seemed nearer at hand.

“But how are we ever to get there?” she exclaimed in unwonted bitterness. “A woman can do nothing but wait and see what drops into her lap. A man can work, and if he is only patient, persevering, and resolute——”

“He may get to the top of the ladder when he’s an old man with a bald head. That’s not the way, Flo. Patience is quite out of date. You should hear Balfour talk. He doesn’t go on with an incessant flow of moralizing, like you. He has the sense to know that it does no good, so he won’t try it; but, after talking with him for half an hour, I feel as if I had had a pint of champagne. He puts new spirit into the dullest.”

“I wish he would come to Aunt Jemima’s dinner-parties.”

“You couldn’t catch him. He would rather

do anything than be bored; and besides, though a capital fellow, and a gentleman down to his boots, he isn't in our set exactly—and wouldn't be if he could," he added quickly, fearful lest the admission should have derogated from the dignity of his friend.

"What is he like?" asked Flora, with a woman's natural curiosity about a man's appearance.

"His hair's as black as a coal, with a queer grey lock in the middle of it, and his face is as white as chalk; his eyes are as sharp as a gimlet—regular stunners; and, barring your friend Fitz-herbert, he's the best-looking fellow I ever saw."

"He sounds like a Monte-Christo."

"Oh, there's nothing romantic about him. He goes in for common sense, and all that sort of thing. Blarney puts his monkey up; and if a man tries to take him in, he's down upon him like a nail.—Where are you off to, Flo?" as he saw that his sister was putting her pencils into their box.

"Only to dress."

"What! going out again?"

"Yes; we dine at the Critchleys', and go to an 'at home' at the Flutterlys' afterwards. Don't look so savage. They say it is the last of the season."

"It is enough to make a fellow savage, to be left alone night after night. I should like to know who would stand it."

"You will, for my sake;" and she came round the table to give him a kiss. As her sweet lips touched his forehead, his face softened. She laid her hand upon his straight fair hair, and looked fondly down upon the regular features, more fitted in their delicate beauty for a girl's face than a boy's. If she could only have infused into them a man's resolution instead of a woman's weakness, she would have faced the future with the courage of a dauntless nature. As it was, there were moments of discouragement, when it seemed too much for her young shoulders to bear the burden of two, and she cried in bitter longing for a father's support and a mother's gentle help, not for her own sake, but her brother's.

Left orphans, they clung to each other as the only two bits of salvage from the wreck of their fortunes; and the tie which bound them together was close as that of a mother's to her child, only on his side was the sweet dependence of the child, and on hers the protecting tenderness of a parent. She was verging on twenty, and he was eighteen; and one year and three-quarters seemed to make all the difference between them. When they sat together day

after day, in the dull little room at the end of a long passage, at the back of No. 200, Bryanstone Square, she tried to rouse him into a man's strength of purpose; and never saw, because she *would* not see, that she might as well have tried to fashion an iron bar out of a bit of putty. Like a beautiful thoroughbred in a race beyond its powers, she might have died, but she would never have given in.

## CHAPTER III.

## LADY FLUTTERLY'S "AT HOME."

HALF-PAST eleven, and Lady Flutterly very much "at home," to judge from the crowds of people who seemed willing to take advantage of the fact. The drawing-rooms were already thronged, when Lady Jemima Broadbent and her beautiful ward tried to make their way through the mass of humanity on the staircase. Their names were passed from gorgeously dressed footmen to the solemnly white-chokered butler, but they seemed as averse to answering to them as a recalcitrant juryman out on the spree.

"Lady Jemima is lost in the crowd; won't you go and rescue her?" said the hostess, turning to Sir Philip Trevellyan, who was standing by her side.

"Is she alone?"

"No. The lovely Flora is with her;" and she looked up at him, with a significant smile.

He went off at once, and after a few minutes emerged from the throng, with the spare figure

of Lady Jemima on his arm, and Flora Tremayne slightly in the rear. Shakes of the hand were interchanged, and the usual greetings. After which Lady Flutterly turned to the Japanese ambassador, who, with his yellow skin and calm impassibility, was the "lion" of the evening. Without the beauty, grace, or utter innocence of a Una, it was her delight to pose as the universal tamer of the "lions" of society. From the successful author of a three-volume novel, to the victorious general of the last campaign, all were invited in turn, to be petted and purred over with that happy, caressing, feline manner of which she was the mistress. Her face was comely, though too plump for the taste of a modern æsthete; her figure verging on *embon-point*; her voice sympathetic. Young men came to her as to a never-tiring confidante; girls let the secret of their last love affair be "cooed" out of them by her dulcet tones. Her eyes said, "Confide in me," and the clasp of her hand, "Trust."

Flora Tremayne, without the meretricious aid of powder or paint, put every woman in the shade. Slightly above the average in height, with a proud little head, gracefully poised on the soft column of her throat—a figure such as Venus might have envied; hair that was bright as autumn leaves, when their russet brown is



wakened into gold by welcome sunbeams; eyes that looked into yours, under the shade of heavy lashes, and straightway stole the heart out of your bosom before you had time to guess their tint; lips that inevitably suggested the idea of a kiss, whilst a certain dignity in her bearing made the longing hopeless; arms that offered a sufficient excuse for the sleeveless fashion of the day; hands that made it a pleasure to say "How d'ye do?" with something more than a bow; and feet that would have attracted attention from a one-eyed man in a crowd. The creamy whiteness of her skin was set off to full advantage by her black dress, with its delicate frills of lace and jet, and her chaperone, conscious of the happy contrast, forbore to urge a premature putting off of mourning.

With worldly wisdom, she never grudged a few pounds on such a profitable investment; but, regarding her niece in the light of a prize animal, to be decked out for a show, often astonished Flora by the liberality of her outlay.

The first start is everything, and she who makes a *faux pas* at the beginning, may sigh in vain for a place in the front rank, when she has once been jostled into the rear. On this principle, the lovely girl, if unsuccessful, runs a chance of being decked out in silks, and satins, and velvets, for two or three years, and dressing

like a Cinderella for the rest of her existence. At present, failure is the last thing probable. Flora is the queen of the evening, and any professional beauties who happen to be there feel rather like gas-lamps put out by the sun.

Basil Fitz-herbert stands by her side, his dark face kindled into animation, his dark eyes glowing with sudden fire, as they meet her upward glance.

"Who is that very eccentric woman leaning against the piano, with a rose-leaf between her finger and thumb? Has she taken too much chloral, and suffering still from the effects?" she asked, with the naïve curiosity of a girl who, in spite of her nineteen years, was fresh to the world and its vagaries.

"She is only the advanced apostle of the æsthetes, lost, like most of her fellows, in a rose-leaf, and blind to the whole galaxy of beauty around her."

"But I thought it was their creed to worship beauty in any shape."

"So it is; but it must be in homœopathic doses. The æsthete will rave about one withered leaf, and turn his back on a wood lit up by the tints of autumn. The women walk about with draggled petticoats, holding one lily in their hands, instead of revelling in such a bouquet as yours. In spite of all their jargon about

grand ideas, and their contemplation of the Infinite through the least of its creatures, it seems to me that they narrow the Infinite down to the size of a molecule, and only stretch after a grand idea, for the purpose of reducing it to the smallest possible comprehension. They are like a parcel of children with a box of insignificant toys, which they have chosen to label with grand names."

"I hope Charlie won't come across any of them; he might think it amusing to do the same."

"Not likely, when he has you by his side; unless he reduced the word to its former signification, when we might all follow his example," he said, playing with her fan, and taking in every point of her beauty with covert glances that feared to degenerate into a stare.

"Brothers are not given to sister-worship, as a rule, and I am always scolding mine, so I'm afraid I shall make him dislike me. Which do you think is best"—and the dark-blue eyes were raised to his, in anxious inquiry—"to let him go his way, and see what comes of it, or to be always worrying him with useless expostulations?"

"In your case, I should advise you to worry;" and he looked down at her with a smile. "Try your hand upon me; I should like to know what it feels like."

"You wouldn't if you were Charlie; you would soon tell me to go away——"

"Not I. That is the very last thing I should say, under any circumstances."

"You don't know. When I have once worried you, you will change your mind."

"Not likely. I think the mind, in nine cases out of ten, is governed by the heart."

"That doesn't affect the question."

"Excuse me, it makes all the difference."

She shook her head. "Charlie is very fond of me, but he can't bear to be bothered."

"And I should like to be bothered; if only——" He stopped abruptly, and his pale cheek flushed.

Nothing is so effective as an unfinished sentence—it presents no end of possibilities to the feminine mind; and Flora, though she took Sir Philip's arm at the moment, and allowed him to conduct her downstairs to have an ice, thought over the man she had left, more than the man she was with, and wondered what he was going to say. It might have been nothing after all; but his eyes seemed to utter what his tongue left unsaid.

"I hoped to escape the crowd by coming into this quiet corner," said Sir Philip Trevellyan, as he leant against the wall by Miss Tremayne's side; "but I see it is hopeless to expect to be

unmobbed, when I have the magnet of attraction with me."

"Still more hopeless when you have a magnet on every side ; " and she demurely tasted her ice.

"One is enough for me ; the rest are superfluous."

"How moderate you are ! Why should you want but one pleasure, when you can have a dozen ? "

"Because my one pleasure swallows up the rest, like a huge leviathan amongst a pack of small fishes."

"Then your one pleasure must be very selfish ; and selfish things are wrong."

"My one pleasure can't be selfish, for it depends upon another."

"I don't follow that quite."

"Let me explain it to you." And bending over her on pretence of fanning her, he was able to lower his voice without the chance of being inaudible. "Take the case of a selfish man—myself, if you like : the moment he is absorbed by a strong passion—a passion worthy of the name—he is taken completely out of himself ; his every feeling, thought, and hope belong to her. Nothing concerns him that does not touch somehow or other upon her, and his only wish is to be with her, to hear her voice, to feel her smile, and, finally, to possess her. I have felt

this myself, so I can speak from experience, and I maintain that nothing is so completely unselfish as an absorbing love."

"It might be selfish," she murmured beneath her breath.

"I don't see it. Tell me how."

"Suppose the case of a poor man, or a bad man. It might be a misfortune to the woman to marry either."

"Certainly poverty is a drawback; but I suppose the man would nurse the thought that he might be rich before he died. As to the bad man, it is an angel's office to convert the wicked, and no one would be more fitted for the office than this woman of my imagination. One look in her face, and the devil would go out of him. Why should you think that I was so very bad?" he said suddenly, with a searching look into her eyes.

"You!" she exclaimed, in astonishment. "I never said that I did."

"I wasn't the poor man, thank goodness, so I thought I must be the other. Do you want me to confess to you, in order that you may exercise the angelic office of forgiveness?"

"No; you had better find your angel before you begin."

"I shall go no further than this."

"Behind you is Mrs. Muncaster. She has the face of one."

"But not the reputation. It is said of her that she remarked to some confidante that she could find an excuse for every crime in the calendar, except *manslaughter*; and that was so very inexpedient."

"Why?"

"Because there are more of the fair sex than our own."

"Horrid woman! But I dare say she didn't say it."

"I dare say she did; but on account of her pretty lips she can say anything, at least to a man."

"Is that the sort of woman you like?" asked Flora, gravely, with a strong feeling of repulsion towards him.

"Like?" he laughed, and his light eyes twinkled. "I don't know about that; but when I can't have an angel, I am forced to put up with something else."

"Will you kindly take me back to my aunt? I am afraid she may be looking for me."

"So soon? Our conversation was so interesting that I never noticed the flight of time. It surely is not late?"

"Very late, I believe;" and she hastily rose from her chair.

"It is always too late when you come, and always too early when you go," he said softly,

as they threaded their way through the by-standers.

"What a dissatisfied person you must be!"

"We are all dissatisfied when perfection vanishes from sight."

"Go back to Mrs. Muncaster, and you will be content."

"Poor little woman! There is nothing perfect about her, except her mouth."

"You forget her conversation;" and she looked up at him, archly.

"The chief charm is, that it is not perfect, but quite the other thing," he answered, with a quiet smile, as if memory went back to many piquant speeches.

"Then, please, don't talk to me again, for there is no *diablerie* in mine, and I know it must be vapid, at least to you;" and her cheeks flushed resentfully.

"To me? Never! When I find you vapid, sense must be gone, and hearing and sight with it. Here is Lady Jemima, so we need not face the stairs."

Basil Fitz-herbert was standing in the hall, as they came out of the cloak-room. His face darkened when he saw that he had been fore-stalled; but it brightened when, one minute later, a lovely face peeped from the carriage window, and a soft voice said, "Good-bye, till——"



"To-morrow, if I may," he answered eagerly.

Trevellyan slapped him on the shoulder.

"Well, Fitz, my friend, how about our wager? I put it down in ponies, but I will alter it if you like. Feel uneasy?"

"Not a bit."

"I am going to lunch there to-morrow; the old lady asked me."

"The old lady didn't ask *me*; but I am going to tea;" and, with a triumphant nod, Basil Fitz-herbert went in search of his hat.

## CHAPTER IV.

### AUNT JEMIMA'S ADVICE.

"EVERY one likes Mr. Fitz-herbert; *cela va sans dire*," said Lady Jemima, holding up a scanty garment of some uncanny material, with which she intended to clothe and to scrub the legs of some unhappy little mortal on her Yorkshire estate. "Not a season passes but some girl or other falls in love with his good-looking face, and swears she must have him, or die. She never has him, and she never dies; and Master Basil goes on just the same, impassible as a Dutchman."

"Then he ought to be ashamed of himself!" and Flora looked up, with the honest indignation of youth.

"Ashamed of himself!" echoed her aunt, with such energy that the gold-rimmed spectacles fell off her beaky nose. "My dear, you shouldn't say such things. He is as honourable a man as ever breathed, and always draws back without making a proposal."

"I call it shameful! He makes love to a girl, draws her on to be fond of him; and then, when the poor thing has lost her heart, walks away with it in his pocket."

"And much better than if he said, 'Come with me.'"

"I don't think so. What could be worse than to feel yourself deluded and deserted at the same time?"

"I can tell you. To live in a shabby genteel villa in the suburbs, with half a dozen hungry children holding on to your skirts, a dowdy dress on your back, and nothing in the larder. That's misery, if you will; and Mr. Fitz-herbert is very wise not to ask a woman to face it. I *must* tell Parker to be more careful with the needles. A whole packet I took out of my box last Saturday, and now only three remain. What a bother servants are, to be sure! It is as impossible to make them see the wickedness of waste, as to get half an ounce of sense out of that lazy brother of yours. What is he doing to-day, I should like to know?"

"Charlie has plenty of sense; but you expect too much from a boy," said Flora, quickly, her heart beating fast, as it always did when half a word was said against her brother. "He has gone out to-day with a friend of his—Captain Balfour."

"Balfour!" Lady Jemima's ferret-like eyes peered over her spectacles, as if on the trail of a surprise. "What Balfour is that? Tell me, child, quick!"

"His name is Balfour; that is all I know."

"Can he be the son of Balfour of Balfour, the Kincardineshire man, who shot young Vivian in a duel? Ah, me! the name carries me back to the time when I was a giddy girl, just like yourself." Overcome by a tide of recollection, the old lady stopped in the act of threading her needle. "There were four or five of them, all young fellows, full of life and daring. Your poor father was one of them, Arthur Vivian another, and young Dalrymple, with a bee in his bonnet, Oliver St. John, and this George Balfour, the fiercest and wildest of the lot. The fun they used to make in the old house, and the riot that went on, morning, noon, and night, and the hopelessness of getting a bit of quietness, with all the nonsensical talk and tittle-tattle, till your head felt ready to burst, and your legs were stiff with the dancing! And then, when the fuss came, and Muriel was missing, and young Vivian dead, how they all dropped off one by one, till my father and I had the big house all to ourselves; and if you gave but a bit of a sneeze, it echoed from room to room, till you felt weary of the sound."

"And who was Muriel?" said Flora, as deeply interested in this sudden glimpse of Lady Jemima's past, as if a mummy had spoken after centuries of silence.

"Your aunt, as much as myself. The sweetest creature that God ever made." A tear that gathered beneath the withered eyelids was surreptitiously wiped away; and then, with a sniff, the old lady promptly changed the subject and resumed her usual manner. "Sir Philip is coming to luncheon, and mind you are civil to him, child. He is a man of the world, accustomed to the best society, at every court in Europe. Don't try any tricks with him; for he has studied woman from every point of view, till by looking at your back hair, he can tell what you are thinking of."

"Then I will always turn it to him, when I think his style of conversation objectionable;" and Flora looked up, with a rippling laugh. "It will be very convenient for my back hair to say, what it would be rude for my tongue to remark."

"Fiddlesticks! I beg you will do nothing of the kind. Objectionable indeed! What will you say next? You are vastly particular for a girl who has to make her own way in the world. One might think you were born a duchess."

"I don't know why I shouldn't be as par-

ticular as to what was said to me, as any duchess in the land;" and up went the proud little head in quiet scorn.

"Hoity-toity! The beggars of the present day want to walk through the mud in satin shoes. But I can tell you, my dear, it won't answer; pride is as inconvenient, as a bodice fastened with a pin. If you depend on it, it will prick you first, and then leave you in the lurch."

"I have nothing else to depend on, if I don't want to be trampled underfoot."

"Trampled underfoot! What next? I should like to see any one look down on a niece of mine! Look here, Flora," she said impressively, as she stroked down the gathers of the small skirt with a carpet-needle; "you have the game in your own hands, if you only have sense to play it. But I am very much afraid it will all go wrong for want of judicious management. It is so easy for a pretty girl to catch a fish; the difficulty lies in the landing." And Lady Jemima shook her head impressively. "If you flirted with half a dozen men, it wouldn't matter; but when you only do it with one, the danger is concentrated, and therefore all the more perilous.

"I never flirted in my life!" and the blue eyes flashed fire.

"Till you met Basil Fitz-herbert," was the placid rejoinder. "How could you, my dear? There can't be a fire without fuel."

"And I never did with him. Ask him, if you doubt me."

"Then you didn't give him that flower from your bouquet, which he was wearing in his coat? I am glad to hear it, for the bouquet with proper care might have lasted for another evening."

"But I did. He asked me for it, and I did not care to give it so much importance as to refuse it." The colour rushed into her cheeks as she made this admission; but Flora Tremayne *could* not tell an untruth, even to hide a folly.

"Oh, indeed! A fine reason—worthy of a Jesuit. No doubt he counts you already as another of his victims."

Flora sprang to her feet.

"What is the matter? Why, child, you are as bad as an earthquake in the room. What ever is the matter?"

"If Basil Fitz-herbert thinks he can play with me as he likes, I will show him that he is mistaken;" and with her head in the air, Flora Tremayne sailed out of the door.

"Was it true? Was it true?" she asked of her heart, as she flung herself down on her bed in a passion of tears. Fresh to the war-

fare of life, every wound hurt so terribly, and every arrow struck home. After another year of fashionable training, she would laugh, where to-day she cried—see through the manœuvring of others, and enjoy the fun of outwitting them. But now, her mind was open to every cruel thought; and bitterly conscious of her own position as a dependant on her aunt's kindness, she was apt to believe that even those who seemed most devoted, might scorn her secretly behind her back.

A knock at the door made her scramble hurriedly to her feet, and catch up a sponge to bathe her eyes, before she said, "Come in."

Charlie entered, with a flower in his button-hole, a pink flush on his cheeks, looking spruce and good-looking—an aristocratic specimen of the young England of the present day—but with less of "the man" about him than boys of his age generally affect.

"Hulloa, Flo! what's the matter?" he asked in real concern as he went up to her, and putting his hands upon her shoulders, looked anxiously into her tear-stained face. "Has that 'old spiteful' been bullying you again? I will just run down and give her a piece of my mind."

"No, no;" and she caught hold of his coat-sleeve to stop him. "It is nothing of the sort. Only I'm tired, and my head aches."



"Rot! You wouldn't cry for any nonsense like that. Is it because Sir Philip is coming to luncheon, and she wants him to like you? I believe it is. Well, then, don't let him; send him about his business, and I'll stand by you, Flo," he said, with great magnanimity, for he remembered fully the loaves and fishes. "I'll see you through with it, if she scratches my eyes out for it afterwards. I can't bear to see you cry, dear. You will give yourself such a red nose."

She laid her head upon his shoulders and sobbed. He stroked her bright hair affectionately, whilst a look of consternation spread over his boyish face. He never had seen her like this before, since their father died. What happened after their mother's death he could not remember, for he was only three years of age, and did not take note of his little sister's emotions.

"Look here, Flo, you must tell me. I am your brother, and I have a right to know," he said, with sudden decision.

She looked up with a little struggling smile. "We seem to have changed our parts."

"Yes; you must depend on me for the future. Balfour says he was a man at sixteen; and I am ever so much older."

"And what did you want just now?" she asked, anxious to divert his thoughts from herself.

He coloured. "Only to ask if you could spare me some tin. I want it badly."

"I have so little left, and it *must* last till the end of the quarter." She looked doubtfully at her purse, as she pulled it out of her pocket. "How much do you want? Ten shillings?"

"I borrowed a pound last night to go to the Alhambra."

"Charlie!" and she looked up at him, with a world of reproach in her eyes.

"Well, I couldn't help it. I wasn't going to stay here all by myself, when you went out."

"But to borrow seems such a dreadful thing."

"If you will give me the money, I will repay it directly."

"Perhaps you will, and ask for some more to-morrow."

"And if I do, you can spare it. Aunt Jemima gives you every dress you wear."

"Yes; but a dress isn't everything. You must have some eight-buttoned gloves, flowers, shoes, etc. It all mounts up."

"Oh, very well; if you can't spare it, Godson must wait;" and he turned away. "There's the luncheon-bell!"

She slipped two sovereigns into his hand, then hurried to the looking-glass to smoothe her hair.

He peeped over her shoulder, and kissed her cheek. "You are not so ugly as you might be," he said admiringly. "I wouldn't change my sister with any one else's." Then he sauntered from the room.

## CHAPTER V.

### SIR PHILIP'S OPINIONS.

"HAVE you ever been to Rome, Miss Tremayne?" and Sir Philip looked up from a mutton-cutlet, to study the beautiful face opposite to him. It was as refreshing to him as a faded sunflower to an æsthete. "Ah! it is a pleasure to come."

"Why do you say 'a pleasure' when you groan over it, as if it were a second name for Hades?" she asked, with a smile.

"Because you are young enough to enjoy it. At the beginning of life it is a source of perpetual delight; the pictures, the palaces, each mouldy old stone, or motheaten door-curtain, comes in for separate adoration. The day is not long enough for your sight-seeing; and the night you spend out of doors, making sonnets in the moonlit Coliseum."

"It sounds so tempting, that I cannot fancy a time of life when I shouldn't enjoy it."

"No; it won't do always. Avoid it in

middle-age, for, looking round at the decay on every side, you feel in your failing powers a brotherhood with that decay; and a creeping feeling of melancholy comes over you, as if your present had already waned into the past. And, above all, fly from it in old age, lest the horror of outliving your life after the example of the Eternal City, might drive you into the *cul-de-sac* of suicide."

"You speak so pathetically, as if you had felt all this yourself. If I had been listening outside the door, I should have fancied that an old man was speaking."

"Ah, that is because I am, above everything else, sympathetic. My heart is so well developed by the circumstances of my roving life, that I can say to the young, 'I have felt;' to the middle-aged, 'I am feeling;' to the aged, 'I know it all beforehand.'"

"There is nothing like travelling for enlarging the ideas," said Lady Jemima, sententiously, as she motioned to her nephew to pass her the peas. "I always find it so easy to talk to a man who has moved about the world. He has got rid of those absurd prejudices to which an Englishman is especially liable."

"Yes," answered Sir Philip, with his peculiar smile. "Every time I return to my native shores, I find myself less trammelled by incon-

venient scruples than I was before. I shed a fresh prejudice whenever I am thrown into contact with a new race of people; and at this rate, by the time I retire from diplomacy, I shall be able to enjoy life thoroughly—when it is over.”

“Before then, I hope,” said Lady Jemima, amiably. “Teach your neighbours to be as large-minded as yourself, and I am sure I, for one, shall owe you a debt of gratitude.”

“But is there not some danger in the ‘utter large-mindedness’ of which Sir Philip speaks?” said Flora, with a slight blush at her own courage.

“None at all,” was the prompt reply. “Prejudice has been the misery of my life. It cramped my existence at home, starved me mentally, and left me what I am—a lonely, harsh old woman.”

“Don’t say that, auntie,” murmured nephew and niece with ready sympathy, whilst Sir Philip sipped his Château Margaux with an air of appreciation.

“You are quite right as to the cramping process,” he said gravely. “It is as bad for the mind, as a pair of Chinese boots would be for the feet—it dwarfs its powers of comprehension. Miss Tremayne, you are fortunate not to have a narrow-minded chaperone.”

"Do you think it is well for a girl to be without any restraint at all?" and she fixed her beautiful eyes upon his, as if she would force him to give an honest answer.

¶ He returned the glance with a look which said, "How lovely you are!" before he answered with his lips.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "Depends upon the girl. Some horses you can guide with a piece of string, others require the curb. If you ask me as to yourself"—he smiled—"I should like you in all cases to follow your first impulse, feeling sure that it would lead you straight."

"Thanks; I am too prone to do that already."

"Why too prone? I say, follow it, and don't fear."

"But if it leads me into difficulties, what then?"

"Tell me, and wherever I may be, I will help you out."

"So long as she has a brother in England, she needn't trouble herself to send to Rome," said Charlie, aggressively.

"But brothers are the last persons in the world to whom a woman would confide these little matters, my dear fellow," said Sir Philip, calmly. "They are convenient for chaperoning

purposes, charming as patient gatherers of the mythical gooseberries, alarming as confidants, and odious as general advisers. Don't you agree with me, Lady Jemima?"

"Certainly; and as for Charlie, there, I should as soon think of asking him for advice, as my maid for a sermon. If you won't take anything more, shall we go into the drawing-room?"

Sir Philip hastened to the door, whilst Flora linked her arm within her brother's to console him for being too late.

The drawing-room was not by any means a model reception-room of the present day—exquisitely painted, artificially darkened, crowded with *bric-à-brac*, and perfumed with strange pastilles. In the first place it was remarkably light—any one could see to read, write, or work, without approaching the window; in the second, it was furnished after a fashion of its own, with some stray bits of the furniture of deceased Broadbents, mixed with some spick-and-span sofas and chairs, which looked like *parvenus* consorting with the old *noblesse*; and, thirdly, it smelt of nothing but a large bunch of roses in a vase on the centre table, placed there by Flora's fair fingers soon after breakfast.

When the carriage came to the door, Sir



Philip soothed Charlie's ruffled feelings, by inviting him to join him at the F.O. at five o'clock for a stroll in the park. By this master-stroke of policy he gained the brother as an ally, and won a smile from the sweetest lips in London. Content with this, he went off in high spirits, satisfied that he had made an advance that morning such as Fitz-herbert would feel it hard to keep up with.

## CHAPTER VI.

## A FIRST SNUB.

SEVERAL visitors were already collected in Lady Emma's drawing-room, when Basil Fitz-herbert was announced. His eager eyes scanned every face till they reached that of Flora Tremayne, and, having reached, stayed there.

Flora's greeting was cold. She turned away from him at once, and bent her whole attention on Lady Flutterly. That is to say, she stooped her head in the attitude of listening, whilst her thoughts remained fixed to the man whose eagerness she had chilled with the frost of disappointment. He gave her one searching glance; and then, crossing the room, sat down by Miss Dynevor, the archest coquette that this age of captivating women has yet developed. He could have done nothing better for his own interest. The eyes that refused to meet his but a minute ago, now followed his every look and gesture; the heart that had closed itself against him, now

doubted its own wisdom. He had made woman his study for years, analyzed her motives, penetrated her wiles, foretold her timely hesitations, and counted on her sudden and irrational impulses ; and he knew that the only way to make yourself "wanted," was to make yourself "scarce." So he left his capricious lady-love to her own devices, and plunged into a flirtation right before her eyes.

Lady Flutterly was rhapsodizing about the Japanese ambassador, the last lion, whose taming process was begun the night before.

"Oh, my dear, such a very delightful man, so intelligent and well-informed. He understood every word I said to him ; and I tried to puzzle him, too, which made it all the more surprising."

"How naughty of you!" murmured her neighbour on the left, a lady of ample dimensions and small mind.

"Wasn't it? But he looked so grave and unimpressible that I felt I must shock him, or be bored ; so when he complained of the false pride of the English, who shut themselves up within thick walls, and grudge to the passer-by a glimpse of their domestic happiness, I said I should like to look into my neighbours' houses, but I wouldn't for the world have any one peep into mine. He raised his thin eyebrows, the

wretch, and smiled with his horrid thick lips. 'Then, surely, madame must have something to hide. Under the cloak of secrecy, much mischief is known to lurk.' And I got red, as a girl in her teens—it was really too absurd of me—but I told him we weren't so bold as his countrywomen, and that made all the difference.'

"And what did he say then?" inquired Flora, as she relieved her visitor of her empty cup, and asked if it should not be replenished.

"No more, love, thank you. It is quite too delicious, but trying to the nerves—sadly trying to the nerves. 'Oh,' he said very quietly, with a twinkle in the corner of his half-shut eye, 'boldness is the fruit of innocence, and they who walked with Buddha in the Gardens of Delight, had no need to wrap their forms in the garments of shame.' Feeling hazy about Buddha, I tried to look wise, whilst hazarding the remark, that if we tried that sort of thing here, we should be killed by the climate, and taken up by the Society for the Prevention of Vice—ha! ha! ha! I quite forgot that I said we should be killed first, till he asked, as gravely as a judge, 'If the society, whose name he did not catch, were a company for the cremation of corpses?' I told him it looked more after our souls than our bodies; when he wanted to know if it were an angelic corporation, with its head-

quarters in paradise. I said, 'Not quite ; but it makes some of us fitter for going there.' And then, to put an end to it, I asked him to take me downstairs to have an ice ; for when a man has such a gigantic thirst for information, it requires the brain of a Solomon to keep up with him. And all the while, you know, I was so dreadfully puzzled as to how to address him. I *couldn't* say 'Hin Lao Tin,' or whatever his name is ; I should have laughed in his face, and then he would not have come to see me again. Do you remember what an exquisitely embroidered garment he wore at Marlborough House ? "

"What a love of a tea-gown it would have made!" said Miss Dynevor, from the other side of the room. "If you had only been good-natured enough to introduce me, I might have coaxed it out of him by the end of the evening."

"You coax too much out of your own countrymen, my dear," said Lady Flutterly, with a little nod ; "be satisfied with that. And now," she added, rising from her seat, "I must go, or I shall be too late for the park. They say the Wilson-Gorings are to be there, and they are sure to meet Captain Pettigrew, for I saw him only yesterday in Bond Street ; and, after all the fuss and scandal, I wouldn't miss it for the world. Good-bye, my love ;

good-bye, dearest friend," to Lady Jemima; "adieu—adieu," to the room in general.

Kissing her hand, with many bows and smiles, her ladyship ambled out of the door. Basil Fitz-herbert escorted her to the landau, which gave him an excuse for leaving Miss Dynevor; and when he returned to the drawing-room, sat down in the vacant seat by Flora's side.

"Who on earth are those Wilson-Gorings," asked Lady Jemima, in an elevated tone, "that Lady Flutterly must run after them like a show? I never saw such a woman for gossip in the whole course of my life!"

"Oh! don't you know?" began Mrs. Mor-daunt, in a confidential whisper. "She and Captain Pettigrew——" The end of the sentence was lost in her hostess's ear, extended for that purpose.

The rest of the guests slipped off, till Basil Fitz-herbert and Flora Tremayne were left practically alone in their seats by the end window. A murmur of voices came from the sofa on which Lady Jemima and her friends were sitting, but each was too much engrossed in the absorbing topic of a woman's folly, to have eyes or ears left for outsiders.

"What have I done?" he said, fixing his earnest eyes upon her downcast face.

"Done?" she echoed vaguely, whilst a rose-pink crept slowly into her cheeks.

"Yes, done," he answered resolutely. "You are not a girl governed by caprice, so you must have some reason for your conduct."

"I don't know that;" and she looked up with a smile. "I generally act upon impulse, and that is second cousin to caprice."

"Excuse me, there is no relationship between them. Caprice makes a girl treat a man coldly, when she is longing to be friends with him all the time; impulse makes a girl show her real feelings, against her will. What I complain of, was your real feeling a few minutes ago. Why did you *wish* to snub me after—after last night?"

"If I did, you consoled yourself soon enough with Miss Dynevor."

"Pshaw! Would you have had me stand in the middle of the room, and wait till you thawed? Tell me why you snubbed me? Tell me; you can't guess what it is to me to know." He bent forward and tried to look into her eyes; but the long lashes drooped shyly on the blushing cheeks, and she would not raise them.

"I did not know that you would care." Her voice was so low that he could scarcely catch the words.

"Not care?" he repeated breathlessly. "As if there were anything in life for which I cared

so much. Miss Tremayne, what made you do it? Had any one been slandering me behind my back?"

"Was it slander? That is the question," she said, with a wistful smile.

"Of course it was; but how can I prove it, if you keep me in the dark? Is that fair between friends?"

"I don't know. It was not much; perhaps I made it too important—only——" She stopped abruptly, playing with the fringe on the front of her dress.

"It *was* important, if it influenced you against me, and I have a right to know." He left off pleading and drew himself up, the usual sternness of his expression intensified by suppressed feeling.

"It was such a little thing to make a fuss about," she said, with a nervous laugh. "They told me that you liked to play with girls' hearts, and throw them away when broken."

"And you believed it?" There was infinite reproach in his eyes as they met hers for the first time.

"I did not know; it might be the way amongst men of fashion. And if you all do it, you might not think it wrong."

"Thanks. Does it make a sin less because you sin in a crowd?"



"I never thought so."

"Then why should I? Is a man necessarily so much worse than a woman?"

"They have more temptations and fewer scruples. I was told to-day that it would be a good thing if all prejudices and scruples were abolished."

"Prejudices are often wrong, but scruples are often right. I should have liked it better, just now, if you had been more scrupulous, and less prejudiced, for instance."

"Don't go back to that."

"Then promise never to snub me again." He leant forward and looked straight into her face.

"How can I show such perfect confidence in a man I have only known for two months?"

"If I swear that I will deserve it?"

"No," with a shake of her head. "Our ideas might differ."

"You are harder than granite," he said, with a smile, as he took up his hat. "Are you coming to the park?"

"No; we never do that. We always go out in the scorching sun at three o'clock; call upon a lot of people, who are naturally annoyed at being found 'at home;' do a little shopping; and come back just as the heat is becoming bearable."

"But what do you do it for? Is it Lady Jemima's idea of a religious penance?"

"She likes it, because she has always done it. In winter three o'clock is rather late for a start, and in summer a hundred times too early; but I can never get her to alter it."

"But why shouldn't you drive in the park at six? There is plenty of time," he said, looking at his watch.

"Have the carriage out twice in the same afternoon! The coachman would give warning on the spot."

"So much the better if he be an ante-diluvian snail, like so many old servants of his specie."

"Aunt Jemima's existence would come to an end without her devoted Smithers. For his sake she deprives herself of a drive on Sunday."

"And what do you do?" he asked, with that great interest in small details which is the distinguishing mark of a man in love.

"Don't ask. Such is the utter weariness of my spirit before the day is over, that I envy my aunt, because she is able to sleep over her sermon."

"Should I be admitted if I ventured to call?"

"No; visitors are prohibited, like everything

else that is pleasant. We go to church in the morning, with the footman stalking behind us, carrying aunt's big Bible and Prayer-book; and we have to wait in our seat till he comes to fetch them again, which generally occurs when the whole congregation has left the church. Charlie rebels and walks off; but I have to sit still as patience, though not on a monument. In the afternoon comes church again, a few prayers and hymns, and, I am sorry to say, a great deal of sleep; but the clergyman *is* so prosy. At home, I used to like Sunday better than any day of the week; but then it used to be *so* different. Oh, don't you think it is dreadful to have been so happy, if it can't last for ever?" she said impulsively, her eyes filling with tears.

"Dante tells us that a sorrow's crown of sorrows is the remembrance of happier days," he said gently, his own eyes brimful of sympathy. "But in your case," he added softly, "I should hope that the crown of your joy was yet in the hand of the future. Good-bye." A long lingering clasp, when fingers spoke what the tongue was afraid to say, and he was gone.

## CHAPTER VII.

“FOR CHARLIE’S SAKE.”

It was May once more—May with its cold winds, bright sunshine, and new-born beauty of leaf and flower; May with its lapful of hope, and promise of later fruition. Its spirit of life and animation seemed to have entered the little sudden school-room in 200, Bryanstone Square. Primroses blossomed in every vase, and violets scented the air, as Flora Tremayne sat in a lounging chair, with a bouquet in her lap, a scrap of a note in her hand, and the sweetest of smiles on her lips. What can be sweeter than true love not given in vain—in vain? Not even death, that puts an end to pain. If ever true love came down to earth, she had seen it in Basil’s eyes, without the help of this scrap of paper with its scanty words to tell her that she had read them right. Her heart was brimming over with happiness, as she leant back in her chair, the sunbeams playing on her glorious

hair and tremulous lips. "O God!" she murmured, "I am not worthy of so much joy!" Sorrow she would face without a tear, but this great burden of happiness seemed almost too much for her to bear. Surely earth had borrowed something of the glory of heaven in the last few minutes. The room was no longer dingy and shabby; the flowers gave out a sweeter scent; the old bust of Cæsar on the mantelpiece seemed about to smile.

He told her, if she loved him, to take those flowers in her hand to Lady Flutterly's ball. The lilies of the valley, in their purity of bloom, should be the sign that she would listen to his vows. She raised them gently, and pressed them to her lips, a soft blush stealing over her cheeks, as the thought crossed her mind that before that evening was over Basil's lips would claim the caress, that now she wasted on his flowers. Lost in a happy dream, she sat quietly there, her heart fluttering like a bird in her bosom, her eyes fixed on the lilies on her knee.

Time passed on, the dressing-bell rang, and yet no Charlie had rushed in to rouse her from her dreams. She thought of him now, as she got up reluctantly. It seemed as if dinner were such a paltry thing for which to disturb herself. She had decided to make her grand toilette later on, so she had nothing to do but to wash her

hands and smoothe her ruffled hair. Lady **Jemima** met her in the hall, with a bouquet of roses and gardenias in her hand.

"Sir Philip has sent you these lovely flowers, and hopes you will honour him by wearing them to-night. I told you that I never saw him so much in earnest as when he made me promise that I would not fail to bring you to Lady **Flutterly's**.

"Earnest, was he? How very refreshing! Look, auntie, I can easily spare you Sir Philip's, when I have such beauties as these;" and she held up her lilies with sparkling eyes.

"Where did they come from?" said Lady **Jemima**, with a sniff of disapprobation, as if they smelt nasty.

"From some one who knew it was my favourite flower;" and she danced up the stairs, humming "For ever and for ever" as she went.

"You won't take them to the ball," the old lady called out after her retreating figure.

"Won't I?" said **Flora**, softly, as she shut the door of her room.

Dinner passed off quietly. Charlie's absence had ceased to be a remarkable fact, as he often dined out with one or other of his numerous friends, and **Flora** was rather glad than not to escape a remark on her silence. She left the conversation to her aunt, who thoroughly en-

joyed the exercise of her tongue, and pictured herself already at the ball, listening to what some one was as ready to say as she to hear. The joy of those few brief hours seemed to her, in after-life, as an island of light in an ocean of darkness. It was only half-past eight when she escaped to her room, eager once more to read the little note and to look at the bunch of lilies. How his face would brighten when he saw her come through the crowd with his flowers in her hand! A feeling of shyness came over her as she thought of meeting his eyes; she felt as if her blushes would betray her to all the assembled throng.

The carriage would not come round till half-past ten; Parker, whose services she shared with her aunt, was downstairs at her supper, so she had a whole hour to herself before she need begin to dress. She drew a chair to the open window, and sat down for a long delicious meditation. Half asleep and half awake, she leant her head upon her hand and dreamed the hour away—a picture of happy indolence, which an artist would have sighed to immortalize with his brush.

Her peace was rudely disturbed by Charlie, who, after a loud knock, entered the room without waiting for a "Come in." His face was white, his eyes bloodshot, and he flung himself

down on the sofa in such a reckless manner that he made all the china ornaments on the table clatter, and some of them fall on the carpet.

"Charlie, what is it?" said Flora, constraining herself to speak calmly, though her heart was beating fast. She noticed that her pet shepherdess was broken, but she was not the sort of woman to throw that in his teeth, when his face told such a tale of misery. "For Heaven's sake, tell me! Nothing is so bad as not to know!" She knelt down by him, and, throwing her arms about his neck, tried to draw his face down to hers.

But he resisted the soft entreaty of voice and eye. He seemed distraught, as if he scarcely knew what she said, or where he was. With something like a groan, he stretched his arms upon the back of the sofa and laid his head upon them. It looked such a fair young head for any weight of woe.

"Charlie, if you love me, tell me. I will do anything on earth to help you, if I can."

The last words seemed to reach his ears, for he muttered sullenly, "Not you. You might have helped me long ago if you only would."

"What do you mean?" Her face looked scared, and her lips were white.

"I wish I were dead!"

"Nonsense; just because you are unhappy for



a day!" For a moment she was indignant at his want of spirit, but the next she was coaxing him with the sweetest caresses. "Tell me, darling. What is it?"

He threw her off roughly, and she only thought how mad with sorrow he must be to do it. She put her cool hand on his golden head; his brain seemed to burn like fire, and she was half wild with alarm.

"Charlie, I shall go mad if you don't speak!"

"You'll go mad if I do!" he said bitterly.

"Never mind. Out with it, dear, whatever it is;" and she nerved herself for the revelation.

"I owe two hundred pounds, and I haven't a farthing in my pocket. There!" and he turned his face again to the sofa.

She got up from her knees and went slowly across the room to her dressing-case, where she kept the few ornaments she possessed. She took out a solid gold bracelet with a diamond star on the clasp. It had belonged to her mother, and she was very fond of it; but Charlie wanted it, so it must go. There was a handsome locket, with a large pearl in the centre—must she sacrifice that as well? Yes. Little as she knew of such matters, she remembered to have heard that things sold for half their value. It gave her a pang to part with them; but what was that in comparison with her brother's peace of mind?

She came back to him with the jewels in her hand. "Charlie dear, look up. You shall have these. They will fetch two hundred pounds, I think; so that will be all right. I must wear the bracelet to-night, but you may have it directly I come home."

"You are very good, Flo," he said hoarsely, turning his haggard face to hers. "I can't bear to take them; and I shall only get out of this hole to find myself in another. There is no help for it. I wish I were dead."

"Don't, Charlie—don't. What can I do? I have nothing but these and the gold chain papa gave me on my birthday; the rest are all Aunt Emma's."

"I tell you what you could do, if you had a mind—marry some rich fellow."

"I can't," she gasped, whilst a frightened look came into her eyes.

"You can if you like. When he came back from Rome, I thought you would have him. I wouldn't bother you about it, but I counted on—indeed I did. It isn't that I want to depend on you, for life, Flo—it isn't really; but if only I could get a start, it would be the making of me."

She sat in a heap on the floor, her face pressed down on her hands.

"I believe you would have had him if Fitz-

herbert had not been in the way ;” and he gave the footstool a kick, as if it had been the absent lover.

“Why do you dislike him ?” came hoarsely from behind the delicate fingers.

“I don’t dislike him ; only he has barely enough to keep himself, much less a wife. He could never give you the position you ought to have ; and as to helping me, he has no more influence than a postman.”

“And the other ?”

“What, Sir Philip ? Oh, he would do first-rate. Lots of tin, private interest to any extent, and all that’s wanted to help a fellow on. I expect I should be in the Foreign Office before six months were over my head ; and then, with something to begin with, and an ambassadorship in the far distance, I should be provided for life. But it’s no use thinking of it,” he added sullenly.

“You would never pass the examination. See how you always fail.”

“Wouldn’t I, though ? Give me the F.O. for an object, and I will work like a nigger to get in. Ah, Flo, you could help me if you would,” he said reproachfully.

She raised her face ; it was whiter than **his** own.

“You would not have me marry him if didn’t love him ?”

"Oh, that's all bosh! Balfour was only saying on other day that the happiest marriages were those which began with mutual liking alone."

"Indeed!" Her lip curled. "Has he tried himself?"

"No; he is head over ears in love with some girl, but he hasn't married her yet."

Parker knocked at the door, and asked if Miss Nora were ready to dress.

"Not yet; come in ten minutes," she cried; and then she got up, placed her hands on her brother's shoulder, and looked tenderly into his troubled face. "If evil comes to you and not me, the blame shall not be mine. Kiss me, darling," she sobbed. "In all the years to come, I shall have no one but you."

And he threw his arms round her and kissed her, and vowed that no man ever had a sister so true to him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“WHERE ARE THE LILIES?”

ONCE more a long file of carriages stop the way in Belgrave Square, and draw up in slow succession at the door of Lady Flutterly's house. Lady Jemima Broadbent, contrary to her wont, was amongst the last to arrive. Horrified at Flora's ghastly appearance as she came down the staircase with Sir Philip's bouquet in her hand, she had insisted upon dosing her with sal volatile, and would not let her stir from the house till a scrap of colour had appeared in her cheeks.

“It is all Charlie's doing, I am sure,” she muttered to herself, but feared to say it aloud, lest a scene should follow, and a burst of tears destroy Flora's beauty for the night. So she wisely held her tongue, promising herself that she would have it all out on the homeward drive, and give that “monkey of a boy” a piece of her unprejudiced mind over the breakfast-table to-morrow morning.

There were crowds of people gathered on the staircase and about the doors, but to Flora's eyes there was but one person there. He was close to the principal door, near which Lady Flutterly stood to receive her guests. His dark head rose high above those around him ; his tall figure stooped forward in irrepressible eagerness ; his eyes, beaming with hope and love, met hers, then travelled slowly down to the roses in her hand, and came back again with a blank stare of incredulity. He would not give up hope. There might be some mistake ; and he clung to the only thought which seemed to have the power of saving him from madness. Her dress brushed his feet, her drooping head came almost in contact with his coat.

" Did you get my note ? " he said hoarsely.

" Yes ;—these are Sir Philip's flowers ;" and, raising her head, she looked him steadily in the face with eyes that never flinched, and passed on into the drawing-room.

If the floor had opened and swallowed her up, he could not have been more utterly astonished. Scarcely knowing what he did, he elbowed his way through the people on the stairs, through the crowd of eager watchers on the pavement, walking on and on, as if in frantic haste, when every object in life seemed suddenly to have gone from him, and there was

no reason for hurry, when there was nothing to be done.

Sir Philip had asked him, laughingly, about the wager that morning, and he had answered so confidently that he would be a richer man before the week was out. What did it mean? If ever he saw love in a girl's eyes, he had read it in the glorious depths of Flora Tremayne's only two days ago. And what could have happened since to change her? Had some one else been slandering him behind his back? But no; she would not have believed it, if he had. Gradually he had crept into her confidence, till he knew, or fancied he knew, every thought of her innocent heart, and he had learnt that she would trust him against the world.

Could her aunt have influenced her to take Sir Philip's bouquet and discard his own? It was possible; but even then there was little comfort, for the look which she had given him with those cold, unflinching eyes seemed to say as plainly as any words, "All is over between us."

He gnashed his teeth as he looked up at the stars in futile wrath. They seemed to mock him as he stared with dazed eyes. What was a mortal's pain to them? He hurried on, made his way into Hyde Park, flung himself down on a bench, and bent his face down upon

his hands. His brain was in a whirl. He thought of her as she was only yesterday, and again as she was weeks and months ago—always with the same sweet look in her eyes, the love shining like a star for an instant, before veiled by a cloud of lashes. He had thought her the kindest, purest, frankest creature in the world, superior to all the tricks and treacheries of a fashionable coquette; a woman as far above her fellows, as perfection is removed from mediocrity; a woman to confide in, to make her the sharer, not only of the daily trifles of ordinary existence, but of all the nobler aspirations, which make the higher life of a man's soul; a woman not easily to be won by the first man who made her a pretty speech, and not lightly to be lost by the one who counted her as the highest prize of existence.

O God! to think it had come to this, when the fruit seemed ready to drop into his hand, when every plan was laid for the happy future, the little nest chosen in which they would cherish their joy! He racked his brain in vain to imagine some reason for the sudden change. From every point of view it was equally inexplicable. Sir Philip had always been on the *tapis* as a possible rival. *He* had never represented himself as a richer man than he was; so that his comparative poverty, as a



clerk in the Treasury, with a small private fortune besides, could not be brought up against him as a sudden objection. Supposing gold to be Lady Jemima's idol, she surely would have thrown her influence into the scale against him from the first.

One moment, he had it in him to rush back to Lady Flutterly's drawing-room and force the truth from Flora's lips; and the next, he was proudly resolved never to humiliate himself by so much as an appeal.

It was early morning when he got up, stretched himself, and looked about at the dewy grass and the clear cold sky, with unseeing eyes. He put his hand up mechanically to straighten his hat, and for the first time discovered that he had been walking through the streets hatless, looking like a madman, or a runaway thief. Without a thought for the wakening glories of the dawn, which flooded sky and earth with its kindling rays, tinting the calm bosom of the Serpentine with roseate hues, and giving new beauty to the fine old elms, so lately shrouded in the mantle of night, he walked slowly through the park to Piccadilly. There he hailed a dissipated hansom, and carried his seared heart to his lodgings.

In very truth his heart was seared with the hot iron of a woman's treachery, and the sca

stood no chance of being healed, except by the chilling fingers of death. Basil Fitz-herbert, unlike most of the male butterflies of the present day, was not a man to forget. His love, after such rude handling, might die, but it would leave such a vacuum behind as no second love would ever have the power thoroughly to fill. If she came back to him to-morrow, he would forgive her ; but if she went her way and gave herself to another, he would never hang about her steps and try to make a bridge out of the memories of the past by which to reach the heights of dangerous passion in the future. No, he would let her be, with the proud, cold chivalry of his nature. He had no wish to bring sorrow on that lovely head of hers because she had been so pitiless to him ; but having once learnt the lesson she had been so careful to teach, he could never forget, if they met a thousand times in after-life, that, in spite of her angel-face, and sweet, frank ways, she had stooped to the heartlessness and falsehood of a very coquette.

## CHAPTER IX.

## WOODED AND WON.

FLORA TREMAYNE, the loveliest girl in a room where the beauty of England was well represented, the envied of partnerless spinsters, the adored of enthusiastic bachelors, gained a heart at every dance, and the unmitigated censure of a whole rowful of dowagers. There was a recklessness in her bearing which had never distinguished it before, and the homage of the multitude, which she had generally kept at a distance by that certain calm dignity of her own, was openly laid at her feet, and not discouraged.

Dancing at the edge of a precipice over which she intended to fall before the night was past, what reason was there for care? If Sir Philip were frightened, so much the better. If he didn't ask her to marry him, she couldn't have him; and so the sacrifice of love and hope, and everything that made life on earth seem a possible reflex of heaven, would never be con-

summated, and the victim would be spared, for want of an altar on which to offer it up.

Disappointed parents, who saw her lure away with no art but that of her beauty, the one particular Cræsus whom they had fixed upon for months as the legitimate prey of their own offspring, followed her graceful figure with disapproving glances. There must be some evil charm in this penniless girl, which made her succeed when others failed—others, too, who, through larger fortune or higher birth, had a better right to win. She *must* be too bold and forward, or why did the men troop round her at the close of every dance, as if she had been a princess of the blood royal, or one of the well-known professional beauties? There was something not quite right behind scenes, depend upon it—a screw loose somewhere; perhaps she was a *ci-devant* actress, whom the young men had ogled from the front row of the stalls. This supposition gained ground amongst the exasperated dowagers. Envy fed upon it, whilst poor Flora danced on, with a smile on her lips, a fire in her eyes, and a dauntless high-bred courage, which never failed so long as the eye of the world was upon her. And those who watched her from the assured vantage-ground of a secure position, never guessed the wild madness of the struggle with her tortured heart to tutor

it into subjection to her brother's needs. It was bleeding to death within her soft white breast, as she put her hand within Sir Philip Trevellyan's arm, and allowed him to lead her where he would.

There was no fear that he would be daunted by the brilliance of her appearance, or the public admiration, which had been lavished on her so boldly. He could have fallen in love with an actress, in the midst of a theatrical ovation, when the plaudits of thousands called her back to the boards, where flowers and jewels were heaped at her feet. His love was no retiring violet, to be hidden behind a leaf; rather more like a flaunting sunflower, looking up boldly into the face of its sun.

Perhaps if she had sat in a corner, neglected and alone, he would have gone away from Lady Flutterly's with his offer unmade; but the triumphant success of her beauty had warmed his love into all the passion of which his woman-out heart was capable; and he counted to the minutes until she was free to bend a listening ear to his vows. Outside, on the balcony, in the quiet stillness of the night, with nothing but the silent stars for witnesses, he asked her to be his wife. She did not answer, but only turned her face to his and trembled. Then, in sudden rapture, he stooped and pressed a passion

kiss on her cold lips. She drew back, shuddering. But he would not be denied ; her silence had given consent.

"My own—my darling !" he murmured, and, throwing his arms round her, he drew her fondly towards him, till her soft brown hair rested on his chest.

There was no outward sign of the tempest within her, only a slight shiver ran through her limbs.

"Let me go," she gasped, and raised her eyes in quiet agony to the stars.

After another lingering embrace he released her, with a sigh of infinite content. All this bright loveliness was his own. No one could take her from him after this, not even Fitzherbert, who had lost his bride and his wager as well. What a stir she would make in Rome, as the loveliest woman that had ever graced the Eternal City since that unfortunate princess, who left it to seek a crown and find a dungeon ! His heart was big with triumph, as, after not at all a *mauvais quart d'heure*, he drew back the lace curtain and stepped from the soft, quiet twilight of the balcony, into the noise and dazzling light of the ballroom.

"Take me to Lady Jemima ; I am tired, and wish to home go," Flora said wearily, as she emerged from behind the curtain.

"So soon, dearest? I had promised myself another half-hour of paradise," he remonstrated.

"I am so tired; let me go home."

And after one look at her face, he made straight for her chaperone in a distant corner.

Sir Philip squeezed Lady Jemima's bony fingers, as he put her into the carriage. "To-morrow," he whispered, "I shall request an interview; at—when shall it be?"

"Three o'clock," she said graciously, "for then we are sure to be alone;" and her heart gave a throb in her elderly breast, for she knew by his confident air that all went well.

"Am I a fool?" he said to himself, as he lighted a cigarette, and walked slowly homewards to his luxurious lodgings. "To sacrifice everything for a pretty face is not like you, Philip; but folly is sweeter than common sense, and, by Jove, I think she is worth it!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Flora, alone in the privacy of her own room, with no eye to spy upon her emotions, no ear to listen to her hard-drawn breath, threw off the stony mask of indifference and let her poor heart free. To-night she would enjoy the luxury of grief; she would probe her wounds with the cruel knife of memory; she would hunt up every little detail of her lover's care and thought for her, every instance of his devotion,

every proof of his infinite superiority to all other men. She would think out her trouble to its utmost furthest limit; realize the priceless worth of all that she had thrown away; torture herself with the endless "might have beens" of a renounced future; and then, to-morrow, she would hold up her head and face the worst. Her courage had never failed her yet; and surely Providence would watch over her with tenderest care when her feet were on the flinty road of self-denying duty.

The clocks were striking five when she came out of her room, a stealthy, ghostly figure, and stole across the passage to Charlie's door. She opened it softly and went in. The light was streaming through the curtains on to the boy's fair face. His long lashes swept his transparent cheeks; his lips were parted in a smile; one arm thrown behind his head, and the skin showing white as a woman's by the bare wrist.

She laid the bracelet and locket on the table close by the looking-glass, where they would be sure to meet his eye as soon as he was up. She felt very pitifully towards him, for our hearts always soften to those on whom we confer the greatest benefits. The good, estimable, provident elder son, who costs us nothing, rarely gets so much love as the prodigal, who costs us all we have. She smiled at all the small



evidences of boyish vanity—the trumpery turquoise ring, side by side with his father’s handsome signet, yesterday’s faded flower for his button-hole, the bunch of charms which spoilt the look of his watch-chain. She arranged them all with a more than sisterly affection, and then came up to his bedside, and watched his calm sleep with eyes that grew dim with tears. He looked as innocent as a child, but scarcely strong enough for the battle of life; scarcely able to bear the burden of the day if the sun waxed hot.

Poor boy! in all the world he had no one to stand by him except herself; and that gave a double strength to their mutual affection. His relations snubbed him as a “ne’er-do-weel,” the senseless son of an extravagant father, who had wasted the most splendid chances of life, and lost his fortune when he ought to have made it colossal. There was some hope for the girl, they said, who was pretty enough to turn the head of a hypothetical Cræsus; but there was none for the boy, who would follow in his father’s steps to ruin, and perhaps a little further—to perdition.

Flora sank down on her knees, and buried her face in the coverlet with many tearless sobs. She prayed for him first—herself next—that he might be kept from this world’s evil and all its

whirlpool of temptation; and that she might find some reward in the happiness of his life, for the sorrows of her own. In her wonderful unselfishness she never owed him a grudge for the sacrifice he had cost. She loved him not one tithe the less because she must love Basil Fitz-herbert no more. Still asleep, but restless, he stretched out his arm, till his fingers came in contact with her face. Lovingly she laid her cheek upon them, and feared to move again for half an hour, lest the movement should wake him. He was happy asleep, and waking would bring back the remembrance of his troubles. Gradually exhausted nature made its claims on her; a drowsiness crept over her tired brain, her heavy eyes closed, her lips parted, her bosom heaved in deep-drawn breaths.

When the footman came in with the morning hot water, he was nearly startled out of his senses to find Miss Treymayne kneeling, in all the splendours of her white ball-dress, by her brother's bedside, fast asleep, with her pretty face pillowed on his hand.

## CHAPTER X.

## MARRIED !

BASIL FITZ-HERBERT was 'cured of his love, when Charlie Tremayne met him in St. James's Street, the day after the ball, and informed him carelessly that his sister was engaged to be married to Sir Philip Trevellyan, and the marriage would probably take place in six weeks' time; it could not endure after such a shock as that. She must have been so utterly heartless to lead him on till the last moment, to the very verge of a proposal; and only throw him over when she had secured a bigger fish. Money and a smooth tongue had won the day, as Sir Philip had prophesied. Good looks and a true heart might go to the wall, when unsupported by an inordinate amount of cash. He was a fool to think that she could be different to other women, a *rara avis* amongst her fellows. So he wrapt himself in his pride, gave up his clerkship in the Treasury, and started vaguely

for the Continent. People said of him, with a pitying shake of the head, "There's another life spoilt by a woman," and soon after forgot his existence.

There was a grand wedding at St. George's, Hanover Square. The master of Strathrowan, a peculiar kind of exotic growth from the hot-house of the nobility, was best man. The Strathrowans dated back to the days of Noah, and claimed to have had a boat of their own, like the famous MacLean, at the time of the flood. His manners were so stupendously deferential, that they involuntarily suggested the idea of mockery to the timid and un-presuming; whilst those who were tired of the limp swagger of the Crutch and Toothpick Brigade, found them eminently delightful and refreshing. He made himself so agreeable to the head bridesmaid, that she founded hopes thereon, which were never destined to be realized. The beauty of the bride was extolled in every society paper, and those who could not say that they had ever spoken to her, felt quite left out in the cold. Many were tempted to imagine they had, in order to hold their own with the more fortunate, for human nature is weak. The fashion papers followed next with plates of the "Tremayne mantle," and the "Flora hat," till Charlie felt quite a celebrated

fellow, because he was the Beauty's brother. His only regret was that he had not been able to have Captain Balfour at the wedding; but Lady Jemima had stoutly refused to invite an unknown stranger, who did not belong to her set. Of course he remarked at once that he had no doubt Balfour would not have been able to come, as there never was such a fellow for engagements; but his disappointment was great, for he wanted to show off his sister, the only thing he had to be proud of, to his *fidus Achates*.

The bride and bridegroom spent their honeymoon in a lovely place, not far from Paris, belonging to Sir Philip's cousin, M. le Marquis de Biron, and, after a while, pursued their way to Rome.

As the wife of the first secretary, Flora made a wonderful sensation in the salons of the British ambassador, which gratified Sir Philip immensely, and made him more in love with her than ever. The last doubt as to his good sense in the choice of a wife vanished; for, as his friends assured him, if he had been a nobody, without fortune or interest, such a woman as Lady Trevellyan would have secured his success. Her sparkling wit, her graceful undulating movements, her unrivalled beauty, were invaluable to a man in diplomacy. They made him welcome wherever he appeared; they lent a charm to

the gatherings at the embassy; they won over the doubtful; they coaxed the recalcitrant into compliance; and they smoothed the roughest tempers into comparative good-humour. If a friend were crusty, he turned him over to his wife, and received him back bland and smiling. If Sir John Mohun, his chief, were inclined to be ill-natured about leave, a smile from Lady Trevellyan made everything straight.

Strange as it may seem, they were fairly happy together. Flora set herself resolutely against the indulgence of vain regrets. She determined not to go about the world with a fox hidden in her breast—a secret, gnawing care, to take all the brightness and the zest out of the little bit of happiness still left in the world. There was little enough, she owned, with a sigh; but she would make the most of what came in her way, and go on bravely, with her face to the front, without one backward look, like Mrs. Lot, to shake her resolution, and fossilize all the true impulses of her nature. More than one unhappy woman, in this present actual life, has been turned into a moral pillar of salt by indulgence in the fatal pleasure of looking back, when duty and honour seemed like a desert in front, and behind lay the sunny pastures of a lost love.

They know that the seemingly sunny pasture

is but a treacherous marsh, which would clog their feet with mire and slush and drag them downward, till heaven were far away and earth the bound of their horizon; and yet they still *must* give the backward look, and tempt their fate.

To such as these, unless an angel comes and take them by the hand, the way is hopelessly steep, the desert so shudderingly bare, that it seems folly to press forward, with their backs to the sunshine and their faces to the shade; and they turn like frail flowers to where the sunbeams lie, and slip out of the memory of those who still trudge on.

Flora Trevellyan was not one of these. Whatever her fate, she had the courage to meet it; only when anything went wrong with Charlie Tremayne, then her heart sank, and the future had its terrors. Although it would not do to whisper that private interest has any influence upon the nominations to the Foreign Office, and even canvassing amongst friends is strictly forbidden, it is certain that Charlie's luck changed after his sister's marriage with Sir Philip, and, after a year and a half of impatience, he found himself admitted within the magic circle, with little but boundless expectations in his pocket.

Well-born, well-bred, good-looking, good-tempered, thoughtless and extravagant, with no

little meannesses to disgust, and many bright, pleasant ways to attract, he was a general favourite with the men of his set, and voted "a capital fellow all round." But this popularity had many disadvantages of its own, which Charlie took very lightly. It is hard for the poor to consort with the rich, and refuse to join in their pleasures ; for there is nothing that a young man would not rather urge than the plea of poverty. Worse than ruin in his own eyes, he hides it from his neighbours as carefully as a leprous spot, and plunges into dissipation with his hands in his empty pockets, and his eyes shut. There was nobody to throw the boy a word of advice ; he had long ago come to hot words with Lady Jemima, which ended in her requesting him to leave the house, as she did not wish "her pious household to be turned topsy-turvy by his sinful, disorderly ways." There was nothing very sinful in his ways, except extravagance—that constant farming on the confidence of others, so often indulged in by men who, in every other instance, would scorn a dishonourable action ; but to the old spinster, with her strict views, he seemed a fit inhabitant for either of the godless cities—Sodom or Gomorrah. As the years went on, she drew into herself like a frightened snail. Without Flora to lend a brightness to every small form of



stately dissipation, she ceased to go out into society, gave up the world, and took to sermons. If Charlie came to pay a duty visit, she gave him a lecture by way of a tip, which made his visits gradually become as rare as snow in June. His sole confidant, as of yore, except when Flora was ever at his side, was Captain Balfour, a mysterious man, who seemed to have no belongings and no affections, except a patronizing sentiment for Charlie Tremayne, and a wild passion for the daughter of a solicitor in Gower Street.

Very close and reserved upon every other point, he was effusive as a girl upon this. It seemed as if his heart would burst if he had no vent for it; and he found in Tremayne a patient listener, who was perfectly ready to believe in Miss Ward's perfections, and only raised an eyebrow in surprise, when he vowed that her eyelashes were an inch and a half in length. Charlie, indeed, took the greatest interest in his friend's love affair, which seemed, with all its passion and excitement, to out-top his own small flirtations to such an extent as to dwarf them into insignificance; and, as a rule, they were far from insignificant to Tremayne's eyes.

When Balfour struck the table with his clenched fist, and swore that it would come to suicide if he couldn't get her, Charlie looked

at him with admiring eyes. Suicide was such a big thing to bring on the *tapis*, that it invested the whole affair with tragic interest.

"Why don't you elope, and have it out with her father afterwards?" he suggested, with characteristic folly.

"Yes, and let old Ward cut her off with a shilling as the result?"

"I dare say he would come round when he found the thing was done."

"But if he didn't, we should find ourselves in a pretty considerable hole."

"Wouldn't love console you?" said Charlie, with a laugh and a boyish blush.

"It wouldn't feed us; and the most amorous of mortals doesn't like to starve;" and Captain Balfour pulled his moustaches reflectively. "There is nothing for it but patience; everything comes to the man who knows how to wait."

"But waiting is the devil."

"True; and he often brings us what we wait for. Come and have a game of billiards. I am rather down on my luck at present; and funds, like everything else, are at a low ebb. A pretty room this for a bride! Don't you think she would admire the curtains and the fine taste of the decorations?" and his black eyes roamed contemptuously round his Bloomsbury lodgings,

with the faded green hangings at the window, the huge stuffed peacock on the buffet, the pipes, tobacco-pouches, and hideous images on the mantelpiece.

“Do you think women care for that sort of thing?”

“Don’t they? Give them something pretty to look at, and they will be content; but shut them up in a den like this, and they will sigh for the moon. Come along; I hate the hole!” And with a scowl on his handsome face, he caught up his hat, cigar-case, and stick, and led the way out of the room.

## CHAPTER XI.

“ ONLY TWO THOUSAND ! ”

FIVE years later—six years, in fact, since this story began—two figures were pacing up and down amongst the mummies in the British Museum. They had not come there to gaze with curiosity on Egyptian relics, or decipher the arrow-headed hieroglyphics on the far-famed deluge-tablet. The mummies might have been no better than stuffed dolls, the tablets clever forgeries of a modern dealer in baked bricks ; they had no eye for scientific discoveries, no time for philosophical research. The minutes were flying all too fast ; soon they must divide and go their different ways, where union seemed life, and separation death. Her little hand clung closely to his arm, his hat nearly touched the top of her bonnet, their voices grew lower and yet more eager as time went on. Quiet people from the reading-room looked their way, and smiled. It seemed like a peep at a real

life-story after the abstraction of engrossing study.

"Kate, we cannot go on like this any longer," said Angus Balfour, in a tone of suppressed passion. "I am literally starving for want of you. My heart hungers for a sight of your sweet face from day to day. When will you come to me, darling? Don't let it be long, or I can't bear it."

She raised her eyes to his—pretty eyes of fawn-like brown. "It isn't my fault, Angus. Nothing can move my father."

"And nothing under a million will satisfy him?"

"Nothing under two thousand. That is the least he will allow in the way of settlement," she said, with a blush; "and he says that is so beggarly, when I think it seems so much."

"He might as well say a million; the other is out of my reach, and he knows it. Ah, Kate, if we could only go back to a primitive state of existence, when there was no marrying or giving in marriage; when there was no talk of dowry on the one hand, or settlements on the other, only people gave themselves to each other for the love that was in them, without a thought beside! Wouldn't I have you to-morrow, dearest, or, rather, this very day?" and he looked into her pale face with glowing eyes.

She shrank away from him, as if frightened at his words. Don't talk so madly, or I shall run home. Papa will be back by half-past six, and I must be there by the time he comes in."

"You poor little thing! did I frighten you? You call that madness, do you? I wonder what you would say if I told you all that was in my heart? I have hard work to talk sense when I am with you."

"Do you try?" and a mischievous glance came into her eyes, which showed she had an appreciation of humour.

"If I don't succeed, it is your fault for looking so distracting. But, seriously, if I get the deedful before the end of the year, will you marry me at once."

"At once?" and she looked doubtfully at aummy, as if she weren't certain of its identity, without raising her head.

"Yes, at once," he rejoined eagerly. "Surely you might be ready after all these years of waiting?"

"Yes; but I must have a trousseau, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, hang the trousseau! Why should we be kept apart for six weeks or so, for the sake of some bonnets and gowns?"

"Because it is necessary for a bride to be clothed as well as any one else. Would you like

to marry me in this dowdy old thing?" and she touched a frill of her dark-brown serge.

"I should like to marry you in your petticoat. So long as I had *you*, do you think I should care about your clothes?"

"But *I* should. And as to yours, I should like you to have a decent coat."

"Oh, you must make up your mind to shabby elbows and shiny seams, for I shan't have any cash to spare on tailoring. It will all be used up for the settlements."

"Never mind," she said brightly. "If your coat were no better than a beggar's, you would look as handsome as a king."

"Which king? I don't know that royalty is a synonym for good looks."

"As—as—Louis Quatorze, of course. He was said to be beautiful as a god."

"At least, his sweethearts told him so; and that's why he never could have too many. Little one, do you ever think of me when I am not with you?"

"Ever? Why, I never think of anything else. The other day I put the mint into *my* claret instead of my soup, because I had just got your letter to say you were coming up to-day."

He stooped his head till his coal-black moustaches hovered close to her delicate lips. She drew back, her cheeks flushed, her heart in a flutter.

"Not here; not now," she whispered.

"No one will see, and I *must*!" His will was stronger than hers, and, as usual, conquered.

Half an hour later he parted from Miss Kate Vard in Gower Street, not far from the paternal mansion, and stood looking after her with eager, longing eyes. It was not till the door closed upon the small brown figure, that he bent his steps in the direction of St. Pancras Station. His regiment, the 127th Foot, had been quartered at Bedford for the last two years, so he had found it delightfully easy to run up to town, from time to time, for a stolen interview with his betrothed. As he threw himself into the corner of a third-class carriage (for on that line the habby genteel second is omitted) he drew his hat over his eyes, lit his pipe, and abandoned himself to reflection.

Two thousand pounds *must* be got. He could not do without her any longer; and as that was the price which the canny lawyer chose to put upon his girl, there was no help for it; it must be paid. The sum had been larger to begin with, but during the last five years it had gradually decreased to more moderate dimensions. The solicitor was a man of large family, and naturally anxious to marry off his girls when they came to reasonable age. Kate was the prettiest of the lot, and had the greatest number of chances;



but she chose to waste them all for the sake of a good-looking soldier, who waited for her with the patience, or impatience perhaps, of a Jacob, without that love-sick Hebrew's more material prospects. It seemed hard to the father that such a suitor should stand in the way of his daughter's social advancement; hard to the daughter that a man like Captain Balfour should be expected to have such a sordid thing as cash. There had been no quarrel between them, for each loved the other with a special feeling of pride in their affection. Kate was to the business man the one bit of poetry in his prosaic existence; and to the daughter, Mr. Ward had been all the world—till the lover came and stole most of her heart away.

Angus Balfour was not a man to be balked by a small obstacle, in fact by any obstacle that it was possible for the ingenuity of man to circumvent; but two thousand pounds was a monstrous mountain, impossible to climb by patient endeavour, or tunnel with engineering craft. And yet it must not daunt him; it *could* not daunt him, when his lovely Kate lay the other side.

As he looked at the matter with prejudiced eyes, it seemed to him a monstrous thing that he, Angus Balfour, should find it so difficult to lay his hand on such a beggarly sum as that, not equal to the daily income of a millionaire.

Why should the money of this world be dealt out in farthings to one, banknotes to the other? The Communists, *refractaires*, *intransigeants*, or whatever name they chose to adopt, were right, when they said each man should start fair and have the same chances. Socialism, in nine cases out of ten, is the outcome of pecuniary need; and it is doubtful if the Reds of Paris would ever have risen up in wild revolt against everything in the shape of order or power—against everything, in fact, that had not a taste of Bohemia, with its love of unrestraint—if they had chanced to have a little more cash in their pockets. It is a natural thing to rave about "equality," when your neighbour has got two loaves and you none; but the cry is speedily stifled when the case is reversed, and your neighbour looks longingly on over his empty plate to your own well-cooked dinner. Then equality becomes irrational, for how could it be just for you to be robbed of the fruit of your labours, whether of the brain or hand, and give half of it to a man who had not laboured? The labour must be shared as well as the profits, and those who are the first to grumble at the large pay of some minister of State, would be sink dismayed at the huge amount of work the office entails. But Captain Balfour, in his present mood, was inclined to grumble at every one who owned the sum of which he longed to be

possessed. He would have overturned the whole framework of society, hoisted the red flag, and abjured every tradition of his life in order to make one mortal happy. He would have been content to see Socialism rampant in the streets, the queen trembling on her throne, the Houses of Parliament coerced by a frantic mob, the palaces in flames, and the rich and the noble flying from the greedy clutches of the "great unwashed;" nay, more, he would have headed the mob himself, if there had been the slightest chance of success, and taken advantage of the revolution to filch two thousand pounds from some plundered bank. He would have gone further than the frail marquise, with her frankly selfish *Après moi, le déluge*. "Let the deluge come to all the world," he cried, "if only a little island may be left high and dry for Kate and me."

As he got out of the train at Bedford, and walked down the quiet roads to the Kempstone barracks, he was still busy with his unsolved problem. He was a determined man, and all the energies of his will were bent on this one object; and the will is a powerful instrument in the hands of any person, unfettered either by fears or scruples. His character was a compound of many vices and few virtues. He could love like an Orpheus and hate like a Borgia, but he would be faithful through life or death to **hi**:

Eurydice, and have eyes for no other woman, whatever her charms. He lost the little money he had, recklessly betting on the unlikeliest horse in a race, and playing *écarté* for high stakes with the best player in the regiment, when his own skill was *nil*; but he never gave away a farthing in charity, having a cold contempt for those who could do nothing for themselves in the race of life. He would not have raised a finger, if by that effort he could have secured an indulgence for himself—changed, for example, his homely glass of beer into a bumper of Chablis or Lafitte—but he would have worked that finger to the bone, and his arm as well, in order to procure some little comfort for the woman he loved. It boded ill for Charlie Tremayne to have such a man for his friend; if ever fate so willed it that he should stand in Balfour's way, it was certain that he, and not Angus, would go to the wall.

As Angus Balfour threw himself down on his bed that night, he thought of Philip Trevellyan, with his lovely wife and well-filled money-bags, and cursed him for the good fortune which seemed to rise in mocking contrast to his own ill-luck.

## CHAPTER XII.

## A FRIEND IN NEED.

"BRENDA dear," said a quiet voice, as a smooth brown head was poked in at the door of the small dining-room at Jessamine Lodge, "I want you to go to Lady Grenville's, instead of me. Now, don't look so horrified; you always enjoy those things more than I do, and your dress is clean, and mine dirty."

Brenda Havergel, a pretty girl of seventeen summers, with fluffy light-brown hair, large, wistful eyes, which generally said a great deal more than they meant, an innocent cherub mouth, and small, straight nose, threw down the duster she was hemming, and exclaimed, "No, that I won't!"

"Oh dear!" and Mary, the eldest sister, seeing that a little persuasion was necessary, came into the room and shut the door behind her. "I have got such a headache; and Edith would much rather have you than me. You

really will like it very much. There will be the Wilsons——”

“Yes; an old lady who grumbles, and 'a daughter who never speaks. Lively additions to a party.”

“And Arthur—you forget him.”

“No, I don't. He went to Wells last Tuesday, and never came here to say good-bye.”

“Ah, because you teased him so the other night. There will be lots of people you know; and if you feel shy, Mrs. Wakenham will be delighted to chaperon you. Come, Bren, don't be disagreeable.”

“I observe that when people want some one else to go to a place where they don't wish to go themselves, they always paint that place *couleur de rose* ;” and Brenda tilted back her chair till it rested on Edith, who was sitting behind her, industriously working at a sewing-machine. “I tell you what, May, if your head is really bad I will run to the chemist and get you a bottle of sal volatile. You shall lie down on the sofa in the spare room, and I will bring you up something extra good for your luncheon. Don't you think you could manage it after that? ”

“If you won't go, of course I shall manage it, but I think you might be more obliging;” and Mary turned away.

"Now, don't go off in a tantrum. I am not going to drive you out in a dying state, in order that Edith may have the pleasure of carrying you home. Of course I will go, but I must have a grumble first."

"Thank you, dear. I knew you would;" and Mary, with a kindly smile on her pleasant face, left the room and went upstairs to her mother.

"That's all right, Bren; I *am* so pleased," said Edith, looking up with sparkling eyes, which much improved the usual quiescent calm of her regular features. "Now we can play in the same set, and you won't bother about coming away too soon, as Mary always does."

"I shan't play at all," said Brenda, gloomily. "I shan't even take my racket or my shoes. It is no fun playing with a lot of stuck-up people to stare at you."

"Good gracious! why not? Don't you want to go, really?"

"Of course not."

"But why? You always care about going out more than any of us."

"Do I? Well, I don't want to go to-day. I hate walking along a dusty road, when every one but a pauper drives; I hate going in a cambric, when every one else is in silks or satins; and, above all, I hate going anywhere where every other person is a grandee, and we are pointed

out as 'the poor Miss Havergels,' if any one is kind enough to ask who those rustics are. I would rather a thousand million times go out to tea with Farmer Jones, who thinks we are somebodies, because we happen to be a little better off than he is himself."

"But you never talked like this before. When the Rookwood party came to the ice, you weren't afraid to skate; and when that tall man, with the air of an emperor, asked if he might take off your skates, you were quite delighted, and talked of nothing else all the next day. Perhaps he will be there to-day," Edith said hopefully, thinking to add a lump of sugar to her sister's cup of bitterness; but, to her surprise, it seemed like another drop of gall.

"And if he were, it would only make it still more unpleasant. Who would think of introducing him to nobodies like us? Much pleasure it would be to hear him asking who were those girls in the dusty shoes."

"My shoes shan't be dusty, for I will take a coarse handkerchief in my pocket to wipe them."

"And pull it out, just as you are talking to a swell."

"Not I; I shall hide it in the hedge till we come back. What flowers would you like to wear? Yellow roses would do very well with your pink cambric."



"Ah! I wish I could wear that, only the velveteen skirt is so shabby."

"I thought you got a new flounce for it."

"Yes, but I never put it on," said Brenda, dejectedly.

"Get it at once, and I will do it for you."

"There is no time."

"Plenty. I will get it for myself." Suiting the action to the word, Edith sprung from her seat, and rushed out of the room before the other could stop her.

By half-past four, the skirt having been completed by Edith's active fingers, the two sisters stood ready dressed before their mother; and Mrs. Havergel's pale face brightened into something like sunshine, as she looked upon her girls, and found them very pretty. "If Lady Grenville asks after me, tell her that I never go out. Don't play too long at tennis, keep close to Mr. Wakenham, and don't come home too late. You both look very nice. Edith's grey goes so very well with your pink, Brenda; any one might think you had dressed yourselves so, on purpose to set each other off."

"Oh, no one will look at us poor things; and if we look nice to you, it is only on account of your motherly pride. Good-bye, my dear mamsey. Take a book and sit under the willow, and *don't* work any more."

"The table-cloth must be mended. However, perhaps I may find time for both. Mind you don't eat an ice when you are hot;" and with this maternal caution to her youngest child, she sent them off.

The road was dusty, the sun was hot, and Brenda walked on like a martyr, with the secret conviction that by the time she reached Lady Grenville's her face would resemble a cook's in the active discharge of her duties. Her spirits were at the lowest ebb when they came to the wide open gates, and found themselves in the midst of a stream of carriages. It is hard to be philosophical at seventeen, when you are a pedestrian by necessity on a hot day in June, and your acquaintances, looking so charmingly cool and comfortable, give you an affable bow from the depths of an elegant landau. Of course it is ridiculous to be humiliated by such a trifle, but the young are ridiculous, and suffer horribly and unreasonably in consequence.

Lady Grenville, in a heliotrope dress of gauze and satin, with a charming though somewhat stereotyped smile on her refined face, welcomed the sisters with graceful cordiality. Edith's racket attracted her attention, and she sent her off immediately under the conduct of her nephew, to join a tennis set under the trees at the other end of the broad lawn.

"You don't play?" she said, turning to Brenda, whose pretty face was blushing nervously under her spotted veil. "Then come and sit down here in the shade, and let me introduce you to Lady Thompson, and Miss Clara Wilkinson."

Both ladies bowed as Brenda sat down on the chair between them, but after a few desultory remarks about the heat and the tennis, etc., turned their backs upon the uninteresting stranger, and became engrossed in conversation — with friends to the right and left.

Feeling angry and neglected, Brenda sat as still as a mummy, with no eyes for the beauty of the gardens or the splendours of the costumes on every side. If she could only have seen Mrs. Wakenham, or any other friend, she might have found a fund of amusement in criticizing the crowd; but alone, amongst a heap of strangers, she was capable of none but the engrossing thought that she wished herself miles away. In fact, so engrossed was she, that she never heard Lady Grenville ask the whole row seated in the chairs to follow her in to tea. And so it came to pass that, without any preparation, she found herself stranded as a veritable "social eddy," with nothing but empty chairs on either side, horribly conspicuous from this public isolation to the eyes of every man, woman, or child who

happened to be strolling across the lawn. She had not the courage to stir, nor the courage to stay. If the earth would only open and swallow her up, she would be so infinitely obliged.

One pair of eyes had been watching her for some time with interest, and their owner, seeing her forlorn condition, after a moment's hesitation, walked straight up to her, and, with a low bow, said respectfully—

“May I presume upon our very slight acquaintance, and have the honour of taking you into tea?”

Brenda gave a start, and her cheeks crimsoned as she recognized her friend of the winter, about whom Edith had teased her that morning. She put out her hand and then half drew it back, remembering that she might as well have contented herself with a bow; but he took it, and shook it cordially. Oh, how dearly welcome he was at that moment! She looked down at the gravel-path to hide the pleasure shining in her eyes, as they walked side by side, past all the groups on the lawn, along the front of the house, to the broad window of the library at the further end. After one glance at the crowded room, he proposed that she should take her seat on an armchair outside, under the shade of a drooping *Devoniensis*, whilst he fetched her an ice or a cup of tea, whichever she preferred.

"An ice, please," as she dropped into the chair, with a sigh of satisfaction. What a providential chance it was that sent this man to her aid, just as he was most needed! She no longer felt hot and dusty. People might stare at her as much as they pleased, for she had the best-looking man in the place to look after her, and neither in fact nor in feeling was she a neglected waif.

Just because her presence could no longer be considered an inestimable boon, Mrs. Wakenham, the wife of the Inglefield rector (no one could call her the "rector's wife") stepped out of the library window in the evitable brown silk, which she always wore at every social gathering, and catching sight of Miss Havergel came up with outstretched hand.

"Oh, Brenda dear, I have found you at last! Your mother sent me a little note this morning to ask me to look after you, and I was so distressed at not being able to see you anywhere. You are not alone?"

"No; Miss Havergel is under my charge," said a deep voice behind her; and, turning round, she recognized our old friend, Basil Fitz-herbert, and greeted him warmly under another name.

"When did you return to England? I thought you were in Vienna."

"So I was, a fortnight ago. A friend of

mine got into difficulties on account of some socialistic papers which were found in his house, and I had to wait longer than I intended, in order to make sure he would not pass the remainder of his life in one of their gloomy prisons."

"Oh, so like you; you are always acting the good Samaritan to some one. Whenever I am in trouble, I hope you won't be very far off," she said, with a laugh. "There's Clara Wilkinson, whom I haven't seen for ages. I must go after her, or she will scold me; but I could not leave you, Brenda, in better hands than Lord Ravenhill's." With a little friendly nod to both, she walked quickly across the lawn, in pursuit of Miss Wilkinson.

"See what it is to have earned a good character;" and Lord Ravenhill drew a low chair near to the pink cambric. "I once saved her little grandson from drowning in one foot of water, and she has done nothing but praise me ever since."

"And you once saved a young lady from doing something dreadful, in a fit of desperation;" and Brenda looked up at him archly from under the fringe of her sunny curls.

"I am only conscious of having been alone amongst a crowd of strangers, and, in the pleasure of recognizing one face I knew, being guilty of a bold action, for which I ask your

pardon;" and his dark eyes looked earnestly into hers, as he chivalrously tried to shift the small burden of the obligation from her shoulders to his. "I thought perhaps you would be kind enough to tell me who some of these people are. That young lady, for instance, in stripes of yellow and brown, as if she had just sprung out of her den in the jungle. What is her name?"

"Miss Clara Wilkinson; and I owe her a grudge;" and Brenda laughed cheerfully as she remembered the dismal feelings of a few minutes ago. "Lady Grenville was kind enough to introduce me to her and another lady, because my sister had gone off to tennis and I was alone; and they promptly turned their backs upon me, after a few remarks.

"How exceedingly rude! Strange that women, so kind and gentle to our sex, should be so cruel to their own."

"I dare say they found me insufferably stupid."

"If you had been, which seems to me impossible, it would be no excuse for their cruelty. Miss Wilkinson must be a tigress by nature, as well as by dress. How curious it would be, if women had to dress up to their characters! What would you appear in? At present you look like a pink rosebud, if I may venture to

iticize; but I cannot tell if the costume is appropriate, for in our short acquaintance I have found no thorns."

"I reserve them for my own family. Only this morning I was more like a bear than a rosebud, though it doesn't sound half so romantic."

"And why? The event must have been extraordinary to cause such a transformation;" and he looked down with a smile at the small black lace toque, sparkling with jet, and the knot of bright hair appearing below it.

"Not very; my sister had a headache, so I was obliged to——" She stopped, fearing to be introduced to a certain friend, and a possible relative of her hostess.

"So you did not want to come? I thought you looked like a martyr when you first arrived."

"Did you see me, then?" And she looked on in surprise, her cheeks slightly flushed at the consciousness of having been observed.

"Yes, I saw you from the first, only your eyes avoided me as if I had been a disagreeable sight. May I get you another ice, or some more of that sweet cup?" and he held out his hand for her empty plate.

"Neither, thank you. I wonder where my sister is?"

"Over there at the end of the lawn, playing with the young Grenville, and far too much in-



terested in the game to think either of thirst or fatigue."

"But how do you know her by sight?" and Brenda's eyes opened wide.

"She was with you on the ice last winter," he said briefly; and for no particular reason Brenda's cheeks became crimson.

Very much annoyed, and fearful lest he should misconstrue the blush into the evidence of a feeling much stronger than casual interest, she tried to think of something to say, but her mind seemed a vacuum. She was relieved from her confusion by Lady Grenville, who came out of the library with a variety of people in her train. She stopped in front of them, with a look of relief.

"Oh, Basil, I am so thankful to find you! Do come with us for a walk down the shrubberies, and talk to everybody if you can. Persuade Miss Havergel to join us," she added, with a courteous smile, as she turned away.

"Which do you prefer? To go, or stay?" he said, without rising from his seat.

"To go," she said quickly, getting up as she spoke. "I would not risk being left alone again on any account."

"You would not have been alone. I place myself entirely at your service," he said gravely; "but perhaps it is kinder to Beatrice to follow in her wake."

"Certainly; she was so anxious to have  
l."

"Only for the space of a minute. Before she  
s as far as that syringa, she will have for-  
ten me—my invariable fate with women."

"And yet you said that their sex was always  
kind to yours."

"Yes; but there is some kindness which  
ders on cruelty—a platitude, I fear, but a  
e one."

Brenda raised her head and looked up at  
1 with grave, considering eyes. It looked  
ther a face nor a figure to be forgotten lightly  
any woman who had eyes to see the tall,  
aight form, and the handsome features in  
the charm of their dark and resolute  
uty.

"Only the other day I had an instance of it in  
nna, from a lady, whom we will call the Countess  
ringa, for she seemed as fair and sweet as this  
ssom." He stretched out his hand and picked  
iece with faded leaves, but charming snowy  
vers. "She was one of the most important  
nesses against my friend, and swore that he  
ne to her house, on a certain evening, with a  
idle of suspicious-looking papers in his hand.  
was with him at the time. We went straight  
m the Ring theatre to her house, and I tried to  
ve to her that if he had had them with him,

I must have known of it. She looked me straight in the face, and swore that she had never seen me—that my friend had come in alone. She had forgotten me completely.”

“It looks as if she remembered you, and was afraid of getting you into a scrape.”

“Impossible! We had scarcely exchanged a dozen words. I was angry with her at the time, for it made me seem an impostor, and it might have been very awkward for Victor.”

“And did your friend get off?”

“Yes; it was proved that the papers had been put in his desk by his own valet, a man who was *lié* with most of the secret societies on the Continent, and made a trade of betraying their plots to the Russians.”

“And how was the wretched man found out?”

“I managed that. I went out conspicuously by the front door, and returned surreptitiously by the back. I then secreted myself behind a heavy curtain in De Zinsky’s private room, which hung before the picture of his dead mother, and waited patiently till I heard a step. It was not long before the man came in, and crept stealthily to his master’s desk. The room was perfectly dark; but guessing the direction of his body by the position of the desk, I pounced upon him. Although he must have been nearly startled out

of his wits, he did not utter a sound, but closed with me at once. I think I should have got the best of it, but the fellow had a knife, with which he would have cut my throat if I had not involuntarily loosed him, and he slipped through my fingers like an eel. However, in the struggle, I wrenched a button off his coat, and by that button, which was of a peculiar pattern, he was subsequently identified. He is at present enjoying his *travaux forcés*. Have I bored you with this long story?"

"It has interested me immensely. Did you ever see the Countess Syringa again?"

Woman-like, she fixed upon the only part of the story, out of which it was possible to weave a romance.

"No; I made a point of not doing so. She sent for me, but I would not go."

"I am sure she had something to confess."

"If so, it concerned Victor more than myself," he said indifferently.

"Oh, how I should like to go about the world, and see all sorts of interesting people!" she exclaimed enthusiastically. "Every one must be happy who has plenty of money and can travel about."

"Do you think so?" he queried, with a melancholy smile. "A small sphere is the happiest. I was a poor man once, and I do not

find that my happiness has increased with my fortunes."

"But a man's sphere is never so tiny as a woman's. A woman sits at home, with nothing to think of but her bills and her needlework; whilst a man has to go out into the world every day of his life to see after his business, whatever it is, so gets a chance of a new idea from every friend he meets on the way."

"And do you sit at home, thinking of nothing but bills? I can't fancy it."

She shook her head. "No; we do the work, and mamma does the thinking."

"I think yours must be a happy home," he said, with a smile.

"And so it is. I grumble very often; but I am sure we are the happiest people in Inglefield, and though our house is the tiniest scrap of a house ever seen—you could put it all in the Rookwood hall, and find plenty of room to pass round it—the garden is the prettiest in the place, with the river, and the waterfall, and the arches of roses. In sunshine or moonlight, I don't know when it looks best."

"And how many sisters to help you to make the sunshine?"

"Two—Mary, the eldest, and Edith, the youngest. Oh dear! I had forgotten her, and the time as well!" she exclaimed in dismay, and

he hastily pulled out her watch. "Mamma told me to be early, and to keep close to Mrs. Wakenham, and I am terribly late, and I haven't spoken a dozen words to her yet."

"No ; but you have authority for saying that you were not under her wing, at least you were in safe hands. Do you really wish to go?" Brenda nodded. "Then I will let you out at the lower gate."

"Oh, thank you ; but I could not think of troubling you so much ;" and she inwardly wondered how he could possibly know the direction of her house.

With a few rapid strides, he was at Lady Grenville's side. After talking to him for a few minutes, Lady Grenville turned round, and came with a curious look on her face towards Brenda.

"It is proposed to turn our steps towards the lighted oak, which you know is the only 'show-ree' left in Rookwood," she said, with a smile. If you are really bent upon leaving us so soon, I will be on your way, and we shall all have the pleasure of escorting you."

## CHAPTER XIII.

## JESSAMINE LODGE.

MRS. HAVERGEL was the widow of a police-magistrate, whose kindly heart was disposed to be more generous to his friends, than just to his wife and children. He had unbounded trust in rogues and swindlers, and only remembered to be cautious when he came across an honest man. His money went, he scarcely knew how; and when the knowledge broke upon him that he had only a few hundreds to his name, he slipped out of the disagreeable scrape, and went where no creditor cared to follow. His wife made no appeal for help; she sat down with her hands in her lap, and her daughters gathered round her. Her Gilbert was gone, and *his* loss made it impossible for her to think of her lost fortune. "*Aide toi, et le ciel t'aidera*"—but don't help yourself if you are a woman, and man is sure to come to your assistance. Seeing that she was utterly helpless, and without any more

thought than an ostrich for the wants of the future, one or two friends rallied round her, and managed to save a few bits of flotsam and jetsam from the general wreck. It was found that, with the strictest economy, she and her three daughters might contrive to live on her settlement.

Mr. Ward, of Gower Street, had managed Gilbert Havergel's affairs for many years, and he came forward in the kindest manner to offer his advice and assistance gratis to the widow. It was he who found out the pretty little cottage on the Wandle, not more than twelve miles from London, where poverty became picturesque, and penury was hidden in a bower of roses; it was he who caused the borders to be bright with many-coloured blossoms, in order that Mrs. Havergel might take kindly to her tiny home; and it was he who came down from London with a basket of fruit from Covent Garden for the young ladies, the day after their arrival, when they were feeling sad and dispirited amongst their new surroundings. They welcomed him so warmly, as their one last link with the happy past, that his genial face glowed with satisfaction, and he exerted himself to the utmost to cheer them up, till they were all laughing round the table.

After this, it became his greatest pleasure to slip down from his office in Lincoln's Inn, and



while away an hour or two in the garden of Jessamine Lodge, teaching Brenda or Mary the names of the ferns, which grew so luxuriantly beside the water, and instructing Edith, the only one who would consent to be his pupil, in the science of fishing, how to catch the trout, dozing the time away so lazily under the small wooden bridge.

The society in the neighbourhood was composed of as many ingredients as a good mince-pie. A retired cheesemonger lived next door to a baronet; a mushroom millionaire turned up his rubicund nose at the impoverished scion of an ancient race, who looked down his own at the plebeian, and forgot to call in answer to his sheaf of cards. The snobs drove to church in gaudy carriages, with restive horses and jangling harness, making a great noise and parade at the door, whilst those who belonged to the higher classes walked in quietly, not wishing to make a public advertisement of their devotions.

Fearing that the Havergels, who were of very good birth, should sink into the slough of aggressive snobbism, Mr. Ward mentioned their names to his client, Basil Fitz-herbert, and asked him to induce his cousin, Lady Grenville, to take them by the hand, and float them at the top of the so-called (by comparison with the depths below) *crème de la crème* of Inglefield society. Many

circumstances combined to make Fitz-herbert forget to do as he was asked. It was not till the winter, when he spent a few days at Rookwood, and inquired the name of the pretty girl whose skates he had taken off, that he suddenly remembered Mr. Ward's request. He did his best, however, to repair his error, and was so earnest about it, that Lady Grenville went to call upon them the next day; and so it came to pass that Mrs. Havergel and her daughters received an invitation to the Rookwood *fête*.

Great issues come from small events; so what might not be expected from an occasion which was the biggest event of Brenda's life?

\* \* \* \* \*

Two ladies were sitting in Lady Grenville's boudoir, the one with a piece of knitting, which suggested a baby's sock; the other with a small sheet of notepaper, as stiff as a bit of buckram, before her, which looked as if it were to be inscribed with an invitation. The August sun was shining brightly outside, and sent a roseate hue through the coloured blinds over the whole room, making every alabaster statuette glow with flesh-like tints, and the small round mirror on the opposite wall shine like a disc of fire.

"Is the girl presentable?" said Mrs. Torrington, languidly.

She was Basil Fitz-herbert's only sister, as

unlike him in feature and general appearance as in personal character. He was slight, whilst she was plump; he was dark and pale, whilst she was fair, with that sort of fairness which is apt to lose its refinement as life advances. People who knew her well liked her but little, whilst those who knew but little of her liked her well. Basil Fitz-herbert, now Lord Ravenhill, through the death of his uncle and his three sons in the awful railway accident, which figured in the papers as the disaster of the river Tay, chilled new acquaintances by a certain reserve of manner, but there was no man who was more valued by his friends.

"Is the girl presentable?" said Mrs. Torrington again, having received no answer to her first attempt.

"Of course she is, as I have her here," said Lady Grenville, quietly. "She is as charming as possible; but, as I told you, she has no fortune except her good looks."

"Which are more likely to cost a fortune than to bring one. Pretty women have always such expensive tastes; they think it their duty to dress up to their beauty."

"Quite right, too, if they can afford it. I know when I first married Robert, fifteen—sixteen years ago, a new dress was the greatest delight he could give me."

"But then you were an heiress, my dear and that makes all the difference;" and Mrs. orrington bent her head to count her stitches.

"Not in the taste, only in the power of satisfying it. With a little management, however, cheap things make a very good effect. Brenda Havergel came to our garden-party last June, in some trumpery muslin or cambric, which couldn't have cost more than eighteen pence a yard, and she looked nicer than most of the people there."

"Ah, yes; a pretty face sets off a dowdy dress, as well as a pretty dress sets off an ugly face. Basil must marry. I tell him so every day of his life."

"And do you produce any effect?"

"Not a bit. I believe that affair with Flora Remayne has soured him for the rest of his life. He threw him over because he was poor, and now that he is rich she is sorry to be out of reach."

"Do you think she cares for him still?" said Lady Grenville, laying down her pen, as if interested in the answer.

"I do. Don't you notice how she never comes to England, if she can help it, except when Basil happens to be abroad? She has picked up a great friendship with the De Birons, and very often stays with them when her husband

runs over to London. There must be something in it, or why should they be so careful not to meet. I dread the day when Basil does meet her again, for the first time. If he is only married, it will be safe."

"Safe?" Up went Lady Grenville's eyebrows. "I think it would be a poor look-out for the wife."

"Not with Basil. His principles are like a high wall all round him. He would not climb over it if a paradise of joy lay the other side."

"Then why would it be unsafe if he were unmarried?"

"Because Sir Philip is—Sir Philip; and—you understand, so I need not explain."

There was a pause, during which the knitting-needles were plied with energy, and the pen never stopped.

"I have used every argument I could think of," said Mrs. Torrington, presently, with a sigh, "but all without success. However, I go on with patience, for continued dropping, it is said, will wear away a stone."

"Then you would prefer Brenda Havergel for a sister-in-law to none at all?"

"I would prefer the daughter of a char-woman to none at all. If the girl has succeeded in taking his fancy, for Heaven's sake bring

them together again, and you will be doing a good work."

"I will take her to Scotland with me, then. But what shall I do if Miss Havergel loses her heart, and he keeps his own under lock and key?"

"You must work upon his chivalry. Tell him that he has compromised her by his attentions, and he will propose the next minute."

"I think I can manage it;" and Lady Grenville smiled. "I will write off to the girl at once, and to him as soon as I get her answer. I would do anything on earth to prevent Ravenhill from going to that horrible man, Edgar Fitz-herbert."

"So would I. I am equal to giving Sir Robert a dose of poison, in order that Basil might marry you."

"Wouldn't do, my dear?" said Lady Grenville, with a shake of the head. "Fifteen years ago it might have answered, but not now. There is the gong, so come and have some luncheon."

## CHAPTER XIV.

## RATHER A LONG WALK.

THE happy free life on the moors suited Brenda Havergel exactly. When no one was there to see, she bounded over the heather like a fresh young fawn, drinking in the sweet, intoxicating air with parted lips and blooming cheeks.

There was a large party staying at Castle Trant, Sir Robert Grenville's shooting-box. Lord Ravenhill, Captain Wellesley, Gordon Grenville, the Dean of —, Major Evans, and several others, of no particular interest, by way of gentlemen; two pretty Miss Chamberlains, and Mrs. Dynevor, a charming widow, with Brenda and Lady Grenville, were the ladies. They got up early in the morning, when the dew was still sparkling on yellow gorse and purple heath; they went to bed so late, that the morning star often shone forth alone amongst a crowd of fading constellations. Sport filled the day, dancing the night; but no one thought

of fatigue, and the word "headache" was forgotten.

Everything had the charm of novelty to Brenda. She had never seen a gun fired except at a review, and she watched every shot with the keenest excitement. If she had followed her own inclination, she would have started with the sportsmen directly after the early breakfast, and gone with them, step by step, no matter if the brooks were deep, the glens steep, or the hillsides smooth and slippery as glass. As she could not do this, she was obliged to content herself with joining them at luncheon, where grouse were sometimes forgotten in favour of petticoats, and flirtations were begun under the shade of a rock to be continued later on in the drawing-room. She was always the first to ask, "What sport?" when the men returned, muddy or dusty, as the case might be, after a long day's work; and she listened to the contents of each bag with the deepest interest, though the poor dead birds were rather a distress to her pitiful heart. She delighted in talking to the gillies, and finding out all she could about their simple homes. Dougal, the shaggy pony, which carried her so safely day after day up the steepest of paths, was her especial pet, and already, after a fortnight's stay, she was grieving over their future but inevitable separation.



Even if it were given to her for her very own, what would the people of Inglefield say to her scampering wildly along the high-road on his back? It wasn't to be thought of; and, alas! all independence would be gone in the cramped life at home. With a sigh she looked down at the lovely prospect before her—the white brook sparkling in the sunshine, the soft mist stealing up the glen and shrouding the tops of the pine-trees in a golden haze. Far away, like two specks in the distance, she could just see the towers of Castle Trant.

“The cause of that sigh, please, Miss Havergel?” said Gordon Grenville, who thought himself privileged to be impertinent because he was Sir Robert's nephew.

“Did I sigh?” and Brenda looked up, startled out of her reverie.

“Yes, with a vengeance. It seemed to come from the very bottom of your boots, only I am sure they were not big enough to hold it. What was it about? Have you just heard that your sister, the tennis-player, has eloped with a burglar; or that the man of your affections, if there is one—I suppose there is”—with a roguish twinkle—“has popped to some one else?”

“Neither, but——”

“A suggestive ‘but,’ which ought to rebuke Gordon for his curiosity,” said Sir Robert, with

a cheery laugh. He was a short man, with broad shoulders, broad face, and broad mouth, about which a good-tempered smile was apt to linger. His rubicund visage was fringed with grey whiskers, and the little hair that he had about his head was principally of a tawny brown. He was a genial fellow, fond of having a lot of youngsters about him, and never so happy as when listening to their chaff. "Don't you tell him, Miss Havergel. A secret told loses half its value. Where's Ravenhill? If we intend to cross the Glenfeshie moor, we ought to be starting at once."

"All right;" and Grenville started to his feet. "I am ready; but I think you might tell me before I go." He looked down at Brenda, with an air of entreaty.

"I have nothing to tell. *Do* go after Sir Robert; he is calling you."

"You are in a great hurry to get rid of me. Ravenhill has not gone yet. I wonder what's up. My aunt looks as solemn as a whole bench of magistrates."

"Gordon, why the d—— don't you come?" cried Sir Robert, his colour rising as he went down the hill with the keepers and dogs, and several of the guns still missing.

"If I bring you a piece of white heather will you tell me?" he still persisted.

Brenda shook her head.

"You are as obdurate as—as a hippopotamus;" and with a laugh, he ran after the others.

"What is to be done, Brenda?" said Lady Grenville, coming forward with an expression of concern rarely seen on her aristocratic features. "Your poor little pony has tumbled down and cut both his knees so dreadfully, that you cannot possibly ride him."

"Dougal hurt? I *am* sorry. How did it happen?" And Brenda looked inclined to cry, as she got up from the grass, eager to go at once and look at her poor favourite's wounds.

"One of the gillies got on his back, and he tripped on a flint. Very stupid of him, for the boy was much too heavy for him. He is very penitent, but he can't carry you home; so what is to be done?"

"Oh, never mind me, I can walk; but do—let me see Dougal. I am sure he would like me to pat him."

"I have sent him home, dear, for he couldn't keep up with us."

"He isn't dead?" and her lips trembled.

"No, nor likely to be for many years to come; so you need not look so tragic. We can easily find you another pony for to-morrow, silly child."

"But he won't be like Dougal."

"No; perhaps he will be a great deal handsomer. The Miss Chamberlains are in a fidget to be off; but I don't know what to do about you."

"If Miss Havergel is not afraid of the walk," said Lord Ravenhill, coming forward; "there is no difficulty. I have already given up my gun to one of the keepers, in order to be ready to escort her."

"Thank you. You are very kind," said Brenda, gratefully, as the colour came back into her cheeks.

"Then that is arranged. You don't know what a relief it is to my mind! I knew that in common politeness I ought to have given up my pony to my guest; but here I should have sat till somebody came to fetch me, for get to the castle I couldn't."

"Dear Lady Grenville, what an idea!"

"Yes, I am ashamed to say it was only an idea. Basil, you are like a pincushion in one's pocket, always at hand when wanted."

He smiled. "Which way do you advise?"

"You must go by the road, along the edge of that frightful precipice. I shudder to think of it. Oh, the Grampians are very beautiful, only it is sometimes as hard to get off them as an unpleasant engagement. Be careful to cross

the river at the right spot, or you will get into dreadful difficulties," she added, as a last caution. "Don't wait for us. Those gillies are mad this afternoon. I believe they have thrown down all the ponies in a heap, and are afraid to come and tell us."

"What are we waiting for?" inquired Ruthella Chamberlain, a tall, handsome girl, who had been sitting at a little distance, watching the hasty sketches which her sister and Mrs. Dynevor were taking of the lovely prospect.

"Waiting for our small animals. Poor Brenda has to walk, on account of Dougal's accident; and Lord Ravenhill has been good-natured enough to give up his sport, in order to escort her home."

"It was no good-nature on my part. There are several letters which it is important for me to write before dinner, and Miss Havergel has afforded me a pleasant excuse for defection.

"I will willingly let Miss Havergel have my pony," said Miss Chamberlain, eagerly. "I shan't mind the walk a bit."

"No more does Brenda," said Lady Grenville, quickly.

"But I should like it," she persisted.

"So will Brenda."

"But she is not so strong as I am."

"I don't know that," she said mendaciously.

for at the moment, she was equal to saying anything in order to prevent her schemes from being frustrated.

"But I can walk ten miles, if necessary. I always go about with papa when we are in the country."

"Walk fifty with Mr. Chamberlain if you like, but not whilst you are under my wing."

"Lord Ravenhill, isn't it absurd? Couldn't I walk back without the slightest difficulty?"

"I could not say without seeing you try; and I should object to a first trial, when a fainting fit——"

"A fainting fit!" she interrupted, impatiently. "I never fainted in my life! Why should I, if Miss Havergel doesn't?"

"Miss Havergel's powers have been already tested, so I have no fears. Perhaps we had better start," turning to Brenda. With a low bow to Miss Chamberlain, and an amused smile at his cousin, he led the way down the narrow path.

"Basil!" cried Lady Grenville, as if struck by a sudden thought. He came back, with a look of inquiry on his face. "When you have reached the foot of the hill, mind you turn to the left."

"To the left?" he exclaimed in surprise. "I could have sworn it was the right."

"Then you would have sworn rashly. Do as I tell you, and we shall see you at Castle Trant before midnight."

"How long do you give us, seriously?"

She considered for a minute. "Two hours and a half. You ought to be with us by six o'clock;" and she turned away in a hurry, lest he should notice the mischievous twinkle in her eyes. "Poor little Brenda!" she said, with a smile, thinking of the plot she had hatched for her benefit.

"Why poor little Brenda?" objected Miss Chamberlain. "She did not dislike the walk, or the companion either."

"No. I should like to see the girl who could dislike Basil."

"He is too reserved for my taste"—with a contemptuous shrug of her shoulders.

"If he is reserved to the world in general, surely it is all the more flattering when he opens out."

"That may be, but it would be rather dull work to trudge for miles by the side of a man who would not speak a word. Besides, there is a fog rising, and if there is anything more detestable than another, it is to wander about vaguely in a Scotch mist."

"A fog!" cried Lady Grenville, in genuine alarm. "If there is a fog, I shall never forgive

myself! But I don't see it," she added, with a sigh of relief. "There is a little mist, but that is only natural in Scotland;" and, comforted by this reflection, she joined the other ladies, who were gathering up their sketching materials as a preparative for departure.



## CHAPTER XV.

## FAR FROM HOME.

BRENDA HAVERGEL was suffering from a sudden attack of shyness when she parted from Lady Grenville, and found herself alone with Lord Ravenhill. But as the path led downward into a chasm, which seemed like the jaws of a leviathan opening to receive her, her attention became so engrossed by the features of the mountain scenery that she forgot herself, in wonder and amazement at their several beauties. Shyness seemed too paltry a thing to intrude amongst the hardened snows of centuries, and the huge boulders of granite, upheaved by a convulsion which must have shaken the earth to its foundations. Her heart was in an unsettled condition, her feelings in a state of transition. A sort of happy trouble came over her when Lord Ravenhill was by her side, and yet her flow of words was stopped, her pulses beat fast, and her ideas became confused. As a natural

consequence, she never was so stupid as when she wished to appear most intelligent.

"You are very silent to-day," he remarked resentfully, as he stooped to pick a piece of moss-ampion which he fastened in his button-hole. Are you grieving still over Dougal's broken news?"

"No; I had forgotten them," she said truthfully, though aware that she ruined her character or kind-heartedness by the confession.

"Already? And half an hour ago they brought tears to your eyes! Strange that women who feel so deeply can forget so soon."

"I don't think they do," she said, rallying her faculties in search of a sensible remark. "They may forget what they ought to remember; but they are sure to remember what they ought to forget."

"Do you speak from the experience of your own life? Surely not;" and he looked down at her with earnest eyes.

"I—don't know. I should be much happier in our small cottage, for instance, if I could forget our dear old home in London."

"And are you not happy, now, poor child?" and his expression softened into infinite compassion.

"Oh yes;" the colour rushed into her cheeks, and she hated herself for having excited his pity.

"Your larger house in London was only a material comfort after all. At your time of life—perhaps the happiest of existence—you ought to be finding out other pleasures, to make the future seem more delightful than the present can ever be."

"I don't;" and she raised her eyebrows ruefully. "If I could only look forward to a time when my gowns would not wear out, and mamma could face "pay-day" without a sigh, then I might be happy indeed."

"Don't let such small cares as these rob you of the brightness of your youth," he said earnestly, looking down at poverty with serene eyes from his position of comfortable wealth. "If you stare too long, for instance, at that ugly patch of rank grass, you will forget the glorious forest over there;" and he pointed to the birch-wood which fringed the forest on the further bank of the river.

"Yes; but if I had to live on that patch of grass, it would make all the difference," she said drily.

"I only wish you to enjoy your life in all its freshness before it is chilled by disappointment. Disillusion comes so soon, and youth is so happy because it fears nothing."

"Were you very happy when you were young?" she said suddenly, raising her eyes for the first time to his grave face.

“Very; my school-days at Westminster were exceedingly pleasant, and only surpassed by the three years I spent at Christchurch. I was about your age, I suppose, when I first went up, and fancied myself a man because my moustaches had begun to grow. Take care, or you will slip.” He held out his hand and helped her down a steep slope into the road, which, with many twists and turns, wound along the top of a precipice, at the foot of which rushed the torrent between its rugged banks, fretting and fuming at the rocks which studded its channel. “My cousin told me to turn to the left, so I obey; but I feel convinced that she has made a mistake.”

“I can trust Lady Grenville.”

“And not me?”

“I think any woman would trust *you*,” she said shyly.

“Yes; they trust—and betray.”

His voice sank, and he walked on in silence. He had no thought of flirtation with the girl beside him, but he was interested in her in spite of himself. There was an indescribable charm to him in her simple, natural ways, free from the affectations and studied allurements of some, the boldness and freedom, degenerating into impudence, of others. He could talk to her without being on the defensive; and he *did* talk, without any thought for the impression

which he might be making on the unworn tablet of her heart. Incapable of the pettiness of conceit, he never contemplated the possibility of her falling in love with himself; so he made no secret of the interest he felt in her, and spent many pleasant half-hours in trying to win her confidence, and to impress upon her that youth was too good a thing to spoil with the canker of discontent. He at least succeeded in making her think that life spent at Castle Trant under his auspices, was like a glimpse of paradise.

"Are you tired?"

A shake of the head.

"Or thirsty?"

Another shake.

"Are you sure you want nothing after this long walk?"

"Nothing."

"We might get something in the way of refreshment in that cottage by the sawmill over there;" and he pointed to a long, low building, like an American log-house on a small scale.

"Are you sure you won't have anything?"

"Nothing. I am enjoying my youth, as you told me to do"—looking up at him with shining eyes. "I want neither to eat, drink, or rest; I am perfectly happy."

"You look as if you were;" and his grave eyes dwelt with satisfaction on the brightness

of her face, as she turned it towards him with a happy laugh. "You are like one of those young larches in that plantation—so light, so bright, and so enduring."

"How can you tell the last? We are miles from home at present."

"Because I think well of you; and I could not bear to imagine that under any circumstances you would not endure to the end."

With wistful eyes, she looked down at the angry waters. "You think better of me than you ought, and yet I have done nothing but grumble. You lead me on, so that the truth comes out before I know it."

"Your little grumbles are nothing; only a sort of froth to hide the good feeling within. In your heart you are thankful for your dear little home, your mother's loving care, and your sisters' joyous affection. Not an hour passes, but you think of these; and everything that happens here gains fresh importance from the thought that you will be able to tell them about it, when you get home."

"Lord Ravenhill, how *could* you know it?" and she turned away her head, for her eyes were full of tears.

"Because your heart is like an open book, and its first page is to be read on your face." He tried to make her look at him, but she

felt as if it were impossible to meet his eyes.

"Are you angry with me?" he said gently.

"*Angry!*" Nothing could exceed the scorn of the exclamation, but she walked on briskly, with averted face, till they reached the ferry-house, where they came to a standstill.

"We had better cross the river here, and when we get to the other side, I shall take the liberty of turning to the left, my good cousin notwithstanding. Here! Hi! a boat!"

The red-haired man, whose privilege it was to convey stray passengers across this tributary of the Spey, came out of the house with a pair of oars in his arms, and pulling the boat to with his horny hand, motioned to Brenda and Ravenhill to get in. Having crossed the torrent in safety, their way led them over some flat meadow-land, where their feet sank in the soft grass, and a mist, stealing stealthily round them, made it difficult to guide their steps. The birch-woods lay straight in front of them, the massive chain of the Grampians behind; and they knew that they must traverse the woods before they reached the forest of pine, larch, oak, elm, and chestnut, in which Castle Trant hid its ancient towers.

"I knew I was right," murmured Lord Ravenhill, as they stopped short on the bank of another impetuous stream, which seemed in

a mighty hurry to reach the river. "Thanks to Beatrice, I have taken you miles out of the right road, and you will be tired out before you can get home."

"Indeed I shan't. But how are we to get over this? Is there no bridge?"

"None. I must carry you."

"Oh, can't we go round another way?" she asked in a **fright**, her cheeks becoming crimson at the suggestion.

"Impossible. Allow me; it won't take a minute;" and, with profound gravity, he took her up in his arms, and stepped down into the stream.

The rush of the water made his legs waver for an instant. He clasped her tightly to him, in the fear of being overbalanced, and, as he stooped forward, their faces touched. The feeling of her soft cheek against his own sent an electric thrill through his whole being; while her heart beat so wildly that it nearly choked her, and she gasped as if for breath, when he set her down without a word on the damp grass. Her face was like a sunset, as she mechanically walked on to the shadowy woods; and his was paler even than the first wan hour of dawn, as he took his place by her side.

Back through years of pretended forgetfulness, his memory rushed to the days when Flora



Tremayne made life seem a dream of ecstasy, robbed of its sordid cares. The touch of a girl's cheek, unreasonable though it may seem, had recalled the passion of despair, which rent his soul when she brushed past him with a cold, unyielding stare, and another man's roses in her hand. He lived over again all the agony and amazement of the moment, and was only brought back to the present by a little sigh from Brenda, who had nearly fallen over a broken stump.

He caught hold of her arm to save her, with an apology for not having seen the obstacle.

"The woods look so dark," she said, with a shiver, as her eyes tried in vain to penetrate the deep shadows in front. With the ghostly mist on one side, the gloomy forest on the other, the prospect was not inviting.

"Are you frightened?" he said kindly. "Take my arm, and I shall be better able to guard you against another stumble."

"Thank you; I can walk best alone." An instinct told her that a vague "something" had come between them during the last few minutes. It was as if their confidential friendship had been left behind on the other bank of the stream.

"I don't know what to do," he said, after a pause. "You will be perfectly worn out by the

me we get home ; but I can't tell how to help . If I went on and fetched a carriage, I could not bring it through these woods ; and it might as well be in the stables, as on the road."

" Yes ; and I should most certainly object to being left alone ; " and she gave another shiver.

" Why won't you take my arm ? "

" Because I don't need it."

" You are angry with me about something," she said, with the ready instinct of a sensitive creature to detect the slightest change. " What have I done to offend you ? "

" Nothing ; " and she leant wearily against the trunk of a tree, both legs and spirits failing her at once.

" Your powers of endurance have been too severely tested," he said compassionately. " Your spirit is willing, but your flesh is weak."

" My spirit was not willing a moment ago, but my common sense tells me that I must make an effort ; " and she roused herself from her recumbent position. " I must endure to the end, or you will despise me."

" Not if the end were beyond your strength. We should be careful to measure our powers, before we choose an aim. And yet," he added seriously, " the noblest efforts have been after the unattainable."

" Then mine ought to be noble to-day, for

nothing ever seemed so utterly unattainable as Castle Trant," she said, with a feeble attempt at a laugh, as she plodded on wearily.

"I tell you what we might do—make our way to Loch Allan, and when we have crossed it, we shall come to a small inn on the other side, where I have no doubt we shall find some kind of vehicle to carry you home. There's a ray of comfort for you!"

"But where is the loch?"

"In the heart of the wood. Summon all your courage for a last effort, and push on bravely;" and without ceremony, he took her hand resolutely, and drew it within his arm. "I believe you would drop before you asked me for assistance."

"If I did, I should know you would pick me up. How dark and dreadful it looks!" she said in an awestruck whisper, as they plunged into the darkness of a narrow glade, where the branches bent so low that Lord Ravenhill had to stoop his head, for fear of losing his hat.

"Don't be afraid;" and he patted her hand reassuringly, as if she had been a child, and he an old man of seventy. His youth seemed so far away that he thought of himself, at two and thirty, as a middle-aged man. "I think I can take care of you as well as most people."

A timid pressure of his arm was the only answer.

## CHAPTER XVI.

“TRUST YOURSELF TO ME.”

IN spite of her utter weariness, Brenda broke into an exclamation of delight as she stepped from under the gloom of the dark pine forest on to the banks of the small loch. Circled by a belt of almost sable foliage, with the moonbeams shining on its radiant bosom, it looked like a diamond set in a band of jet. There was a light on the opposite bank, peeping like a glowworm from amongst the shadows, but not a sound broke the stillness, except the lap of the waters against the banks,—a soft whisper, scarcely distinct enough to be called a sound. Lord Ravenhill put his hands on either side of his mouth, and shouted; but the only answer was the cry of a screech-owl, whom he had roused from its slumbers. The bird flew across the water and disappeared in the darkness, and silence settled once more upon the lake.

“The people must be deaf or drunk,” he

said impatiently. "If we wait here till midnight, I don't believe they will bring us a boat."

"There is one under the trees. Can't we take that?" and Brenda pointed to a boat that was lying bottom upwards on the sandy strand.

"By all means, if it is only water-tight."

He went up to it, examined it carefully, tapped it all over; and failing to discover a hole, turned it over, and sent it with a splash into the water. A ptarmigan, startled from its sleep, watched their proceedings with interest from a secure shelter overhead; but when the boat was pushed off by Lord Ravenhill, with Brenda seated in the stern, and he stepped in after her, then the bird fluttered its feathers as a protest against their imprudence, and sank back into repose with an air of superior wisdom. He knew all about the boat, having watched it year after year, flying backwards and forwards, in rain or "shine," with comely Colin Sander-son for the rower; and he knew better than to trust himself on it now, if he had not two wings wherewith to save his life when other resources failed.

With Basil's coat wrapped round her shoulders to keep her from the evening chill, with the tiller-ropes in her hands, and no further exertion necessary than an occasional gentle pull, Brenda leant back in quiet content, b

and mind at rest. Alone with Lord Ravenhill in the quiet moonlight, she was inexpressibly happy. She did not ask herself why she felt so blessed; or she might have answered honestly, according to her lights, that it was delightful to enjoy the gliding motion of the boat, which was bearing her so comfortably on their homeward way, after the weary trudge over rough rocks and heavy grass with blistered feet. She would not talk, for it seemed as if there were something too sacred in the silence of nature, which made heaven more near and trivial conversation out of place. Her heart was full, but not with that fulness which can be relieved by the use of the tongue.

Covertly gazing from under her long lashes at the handsome face in front of her, she saw it change. The oars grated in their rowlocks, as Basil bent his head in fixed contemplation of the bottom of the boat. His face looked ghastly in the moonlight, as he raised it; but he only said, with an affectation of calmness—

"I think your feet must be damp; the water seems to be coming in;" and stooping over his oars, he rowed as a man *must* row in a race between life and death.

Brenda caught up her feet, and felt the soles of her boots. They were soaking wet. Still, her only idea of danger came from the fact that

he was evidently straining every muscle to gain — the shore.

“Does the boat leak?” she asked, with a ~~an~~ gasp.

“Yes.” This was no time for kindly deceit — “Take my hat,” he said briefly, “and try to ~~to~~ bale it out.”

He had thrown it down when he took the oars, and she had picked it up and treasured it in her lap. She worked with a will, but the water rather increased than diminished. Higher and higher it crept, as if in mockery of the poor little hands that did their best to stop it. Lord Ravenhill drew a hard breath. The veins on his forehead stood out in swollen cords, his broad chest heaved with the mighty effort he was making to save a girl's life. His own was literally as nothing in comparison with hers. He thought of the widowed mother at Ingfield, and felt as if she were crying to him to save her child—the poor simple child who had trusted herself with such implicit confidence in him, and he had brought her to this! His eyes absolutely filled with tears, as he saw Brenda struggling with the rising waters. The strength between them was so unequal; they were strong in aggression, and she so weak in defence.

“How far are we now?” he said hoarsely

“About a boat's length beyond the middle

she answered quietly, after raising her head for an instant to measure the distance.

"Then shout. I—have no breath to spare."

And Brenda shouted, as in all her young life she had never shouted before. Still no answer from the shore, only the light in the window of the inn had grown from a glowworm into a lantern.

The oars went backward with a strong and vigorous stroke, but such was the weight of water in the boat that it scarcely advanced an inch.

The tears ran down Brenda's cheeks. It would not have been so hard to die a month ago—but now! "God have mercy!" she faltered. "Oh, save us, for Jesus' sake, and——" And then the boat sank down from under her feet, the hungry waters gurgled into her mouth, and as she battled vainly with the waves, a strong arm was thrown round her, and a voice said hoarsely, "Trust yourself to me."

Earth seemed already gone, as, half choked and blinded, she caught a glimpse of the moon-lit skies.

Then her lids closed, and she saw nothing—knew nothing—but a vision of her home rose out of the darkness, her mother's voice seemed to mix with the bewildering rush of waters in her ears—and then all passed away, and night,



darker and mirker than any night she had seen on earth, seemed to close round her and suffocate her in its stifling embrace.

The light in the window of the inn sent a straggling ray across the water. It shone on a blanched face and drooping head, as a brave man struggled with all his strength to land his burden on the bank. Had Heaven forgotten them, that no one came to help, whilst strength and breath alike were failing?

And then, just before it was too late, the inn door opened, and a curly head was thrust out into the night. In another minute, Colin Sanderson, snatching at a rope which lay on the path, ran down to the water's edge, and throwing the end to Lord Ravenhill, told him to catch hold, and he would haul him in.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### AN ALARM.

BRENDA awoke to find herself lying on the horse-hair sofa in the inn parlour, with Lord Ravenhill, haggard and worn, looking down on her with anxious eyes.

“Thank God!” he said fervently, and turned away, as the long lashes lifted and the pale lips quivered with a smile.

If he had been up to the exertion, he would have started off at once to fetch the Grenvilles’ carriage, on finding that there was no such thing as a vehicle of any description to be had for love or money; but as it was impossible to walk about ten miles in a state of utter exhaustion, he was thankful for the services of the landlady’s son. Colin vowed that he would get there in less than two hours, so that they might expect the carriage, allowing for a little delay in getting it ready, in about three hours and a half.

A hasty repast, consisting principally of fish and eggs, was prepared for the exhausted wayfarers, whilst they divested themselves of their dripping clothes, and put on strange-looking garments lent by Mrs. Sanderson, the landlady, and her son.

Brenda came into the parlour shyly, conscious of the shortness of her homespun skirt, and the voluminous breadth of her white linen bodice; but she forgot them both when her eye fell on Lord Ravenhill, with high shirt-collars above his ears, a plaid necktie with a large bow, a pea-jacket, and velveteen trousers up to his ankles. She was almost too weary to eat, but she felt better after a big glass of "Highland dew" and water, which she was forced to drink in spite of many protestations. Mrs. Sanderson had proposed to put her to bed at once, but nothing could induce her to consent to such a sensible arrangement. She preferred to sit and shiver by the peat fire, with Lord Ravenhill in the inglenook, to retiring upstairs to a strange room, when she might be disturbed in three hours' time by the arrival of the carriage from Castle Trant.

Mrs. Sanderson, a plain-faced woman, with sandy hair and buxom figure, bustled about the room till the remains of the dinner were cleared away, when she retired into the back kitchen,

intent upon eating up the fragments, for a frugal Scotchwoman never despises broken bits.

When she was gone, Brenda bent forward with outstretched hand. "What do I not owe you for saving my life?" she said tremulously.

He took the small white hand in his and looked at it tenderly, then pressed it gently, and dropped it. If she had not been, as it were, under his protection for the rest of the evening, he would have kissed it; but, scrupulously anxious not to presume on her defencelessness, he contented himself with letting it go, whilst he said briefly, "I owe you everything for being saved." Then he got up, and looked out at the open door.

Wondering what he meant, Brenda sat still and pondered. She was too tired to fret and fume over the delay. A delicious languor was upon her, and it was perfect bliss to sit still, without the necessity of stirring so much as a finger. Lord Ravenhill, on the contrary, after the lapse of an hour or two, seemed to find a relief in constant movement. One moment, he was flattening his nose against the window-pane, the next, he was tramping about the small garden. He pulled out his watch, although it had stopped, so many times, that Mrs. Sander-son noticed it, and remarked, with a glance at the Dutch clock on the wall, "She has never

leeved at a', syne the gudeman died;" and then, yawning drearily, asked if there was any reason why she might not go to bed, as she was a hardworking woman, up betimes in the morning.

Lord Ravenhill asked how much he owed her, and promptly gave her twice as much as she demanded, whereby he prejudiced the interests of all subsequent travellers. She thanked him with plain-spoken gratitude; and, after putting up the shutters—"for Colin," who had been despatched to Castle Trant, "was a dour callant, not much to be accounted of in the way of prudence—" took her pewter candlestick in her hand, and retired with slow steps, each of which could be distinctly counted up the wooden staircase.

Brenda was sleeping as quietly as a child, her small head drooping like a faded flower on her shoulder, when Lord Ravenhill came back to the fireplace, after settling his bill. She looked a picture of innocence in the graceful abandonment of her attitude—her long lashes resting in a silken fringe on the velvet of her cheek, her lips slightly parted with a nascent smile, her bosom heaving with deep-drawn breaths, her hands crossed idly in her lap. He stood before her, spellbound. What new loveliness had come to her, to make her look so

divinely fair? What new charm had she gained since the morning, when they laughed over the second crop of strawberries at breakfast? He could not tell if the change were in her, or in himself; but, as he looked, his heart stirred within him strangely, and the eyes which had dwelt on her prettiness day after day with dispassionate indifference, now feasted on her beauty, as a bee on the honey of its favourite flower. With a sigh, he turned away; such a sigh as an anchorite might have given who had relinquished all the pleasure of earthly ties, and starved his passions on a lonely diet of pulse and water.

But, as he turned, his eye fell on the landlady's plaid shawl, which she had brought down for the lady's benefit, and left on the back of a chair. He rolled it up into a sort of cushion, and creeping softly to Brenda's side, raised her head gently with reverent fingers, and deftly inserted the shawl behind it. That done, he took his stand by the door, anathematizing the absent Colin for his long delay. On his own account he did not care a straw; he could have made himself perfectly comfortable at the inn, and strolled back to the castle, enjoying the freshness of the dewy morning. But for a young girl, like Brenda Havergel, to be missing for a whole night, was a serious matter; and,

being perfectly alive to the possible risk, he was feverishly anxious to prevent it. Whilst she still slept on, in calm unconsciousness, he made up his mind to start himself in search of the carriage, as his messenger seemed to have failed. He crossed the room quickly, intending to resume his own clothes, which had been hung to dry by the kitchen fire. They were perfectly wet, and it was some time before he could manage to get into them. His coat was at the bottom of the loch, having fallen from Brenda's shoulders when she first stooped down to bale out the water, and his hat was keeping it company. He put on the pea-jacket over his own damp waistcoat, but shook his head at the greasy lining of the Scotch cap, which young Sanderson had provided for his use. He decided to remain uncovered, and threw it down with a gesture of disgust.

As he came out of the kitchen, Brenda looked up with startled eyes. "I thought you had gone," she said, with a shiver, "and I was so frightened."

"I am not gone, but I am going," he answered, with a smile. "I cannot bear to see you sitting there when you are tired out, so I am going after the carriage, as Colin does not seem to bring it."

"Oh, please don't!" and she clasped her

ands, entreatingly. "I wouldn't be left here alone, for the world."

"But suppose the man is drinking away the night in some small public-house on the road, where shall we be then? To tell you the truth, I thought he wasn't quite sober when he went off."

Fairly terrified, she caught hold of his sleeve to detain him. "Then he will come back quite tipsy, and murder me. If you go, I shall think the cruellest thing that was ever done."

"Be reasonable, child," he said gravely. "For every reason it is better that I should."

"But you won't do it? I should die of fright, left here all by myself. I was always a coward, and to-night I feel so creepy."

"Creepy?" and for a moment he rested his hand soothingly on her sunny head.

"Yes; to have been so near death is awful. I shall never forget it;" and he felt her shudder at the remembrance.

He was full of pity for her; but his common sense told him that the truest kindness was not to yield.

"Listen to me, Miss Havergel," he began gravely. "Even if my absence makes you a little nervous, it is better for you that I should go."

She looked up at him with puzzled, uncom-



prehending eyes; then suddenly a vivid blush dyed her cheeks, her lids drooped, and, letting go his arm, she bent over the fire, without a word.

"Won't you lie down on the sofa whilst I am gone?"

"No; I will stay here," in a scarcely audible murmur, for she was nearly dying of shame, to think that she had forced him to explain that it was for her sake he was going, because she would ask him to stay.

He walked slowly to the door; but before he could open it, there were three distinct taps on the window-shutter, accompanied by a low whistle. Thinking that it was Colin Sanderson, he flung it open; but stepped quickly forward to bar the passage, when he saw a suspicious-looking man, with a gun in his hand, peering at him curiously out of the darkness.

"What do you want?" he aid sternly.

There was no answer; the light from the doorway streamed upon a red beard and blood-shot eyes, but their owner stepped back, with a muttered curse, and slipped away into the darkness.

Listening intently, Lord Ravenhill heard the tramp of several feet on the road, as the man joined his comrades, who were lurking behind the hedge. It was evidently a band of

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poachers, with whom young Sanderson was probably in league; and if he went out now, they would most likely return, with the intention of making a night of it in the inn. Under such circumstances it was utterly impossible to leave Brenda to their tender mercies; and, intensely annoyed by the embarrassment of the position, he threw himself down in a chair, with an angry sigh.

Brenda gave a timid glance over her shoulder. "Why don't you go?"

"Because you were quite right; it is better for me to stay."

"Oh no," she said hurriedly; "I would rather you went."

"Is that a woman's natural perversity?"

"No; you said it was best."

"But I can't go; there is a band of poachers about."

"Was that man a poacher?"

"Yes."

"Well, you sent him off; he is not likely to come back."

"I would not leave you for the world."

"Not if I ask you to go?"

"Not if you ask;" and he smiled, as he got up and leant his back against the chimney.

"Then I think I shall ask Mrs. Sanderson if I may lie down in a corner of her

room;" and she pushed away her chair, as she spoke.

"This is ridiculous!" His dark brows met in a frown.

"Not at all," she said, with dignity, her eyes still bent on the fire.

"Look at me"—with sudden impatience. "Am I an ogre that you are afraid to look in my face?"

"Not quite;" and a small smile twinkled round the corners of her mouth.

"As we are both stranded here, like shipwrecked mariners, why, in Heaven's name, shouldn't we behave like sociable beings?"

She hesitated, with her hand on the back of her chair.

"If by staying here I drive you away from the fire, I shall go and stand outside in the garden. Brenda, don't you hear me?" and, growing warmer as she grew cold, he bent down, and looked closely into her blushing face. "If you go away, I shall think you hate me."

She sat down without a word, quivering all over. By a slip of the tongue he had called her by her Christian name, and her heart beat furiously.

He drew a chair to the other side of the fire, threw a fresh log on the expiring embers, and stretched out his hands to the flickering

laze. Though it was a warm night in August, he was chilled to the bone by the damp things which he had clothed himself for his walk. The minutes passed slowly away. Brenda's powers of conversation were entirely stopped by a feeling of restraint; and Lord Ravenhill, though he did his best to restore her composure, felt that he made but little progress. He was annoyed with himself for having destroyed the perfect unconstraint of their friendship by his attempt to be extra prudent; and now that her distrustful eyes looked at anything but his own face, he studied her with increasing interest, and would have liked very much to meet her retty, questioning glance.

From time to time, a distant shot proclaimed that the poachers were at their work, whilst others slept. It had a weird sound in the silent night, and Brenda shivered as she listened. When several low whistles were heard outside, he nearly started to her feet in sudden fright.

"I thought they were coming in," she altered, casting an awestruck glance over her shoulder.

"And if they did, you have nothing to fear. Am I not here to protect you?"

"Yes; but if they were six to one? This house is so lonely."

"Poachers don't make war upon their fellow-

creatures," he said with a smile. "If you were a hare or a rabbit, there might be some danger."

"They *are* coming!" and, terrified beyond control, she started to her feet with blanched cheeks.

"No, no; it is the sound of wheels."

A thump on the shaky door confirmed her fears. It would not bear much; the rusty bolts rattled in their fastenings, and the hinges were out of repair.

"Colin, lad, ye maun let us in," said a gruff voice, lowered to a whisper. "We hae na had siccan a night's wark for a twalmonth, and we'll gie you——"

"Whisht," said another hoarsely. "Colin's fra' hame; so we maun let oursels in, if we are speerin after a drap o' whiskey to-nicht;" and with a violent push of his knee, he loosened the fastenings of the bolt. The hinges gave way, and with a crash the broken door fell down upon the floor. Six or seven drunken men were about to tumble in unceremoniously, when, to their surprise, they were confronted by a tall figure brandishing a poker.

"Hide!" whispered Lord Ravenhill to Brenda, as he strode to the door; but, rooted to the spot where he had left her, she stood looking after him with panic-struck eyes.

"What do you mean by breaking into an

honest man's house like this?" he demanded imperiously. "Be off at once, or to-morrow I give you up to the police."

The men hesitated. If they had not been more than half intoxicated, they would have slunk off at the first sight of a stranger's face; but as it was, they egged each other on with nudges.

"We maun hae a drap o' whiskey," said the foremost one doggedly, and he tried to push his way into the room, but Lord Ravenhill barred the doorway.

"Then you must get it elsewhere."

With a fearful oath, the poacher swore that he would get it there, if he died for it; and, looking over his shoulder, he cried to his comrades to come on. Basil set his teeth, and prepared for their onset, his eyes flashing, and his cheeks livid with passion. He *must* keep them out for Brenda's sake; but what could one man do against half a dozen?

At that moment, when their position was really desperate, Mrs. Sanderson threw open her window on the second floor, and calling them all a set of white-livered hounds, dared them to lay a finger on anything in the house, or they should rue it to the last day of their lives, so sure as her name was Maggie Sanderson. This created a diversion.

Whilst they were staring up at the white night-cap quivering with wrath, Lord Ravenhill caught hold of a settle, the end of which was just within his reach, and placed it slantwise across the doorway. "There," he said resolutely, "the first man who steps across it, I fell to the ground."

"Saftly, me maister," jeered one from the background. "It's ill crowin' so loud, when there's powder and shot to the fore;" and raising his gun, he deliberately aimed it at Lord Ravenhill's face.

Not an eyelash quivered, but down came the poker with such a crash that it severed the muzzle from the stock. The gun went off at the same moment, some of the shot was lodged in a comrade's shoulder, and as he fell down on the path with the sudden shock, Mrs. Sanderson screeched "Murther!" at the top of her voice, whilst Brenda uttered a piercing scream. The poacher, infuriated at the loss of his gun, rushed upon Basil with a loud curse. He received a blow from Lord Ravenhill's clenched fist, which sent him backwards over his prostrate friend.

In another moment the five others would have flung themselves upon him, when the welcome sound of wheels came along the road, and as the brougham from Castle Trant drove

up to the garden gate, the poachers, frightened by the fear of discovery, picked up their fallen comrades, and vanished like a herd of startled deer over the hedge.

The carriage door was opened, and out stepped Lady Grenville, very much bewildered at the scene she had just witnessed. "Where's Brenda?" were her first words, as Lord Ravenhill led her into the inn.

"Here. It is very good of you to come yourself," he said, as he kicked the fragments of the door away from the threshold.

Brenda ran forward.

Lady Grenville opened wide her arms, and clasped her to her breast. "My child, my child! thank God you are safe!" and, very much agitated, she began to cry. "And are neither of you hurt?" she said, after a pause, looking from one to the other with anxious eyes, whilst she dropped down on to a chair, for her knees trembled.

"Neither. We have both been very nearly drowned, and have since run a risk of being murdered by some drunken poachers; but we are alive and well, notwithstanding," said Ravenhill.

"Then that was the shot I heard. Good God! how dreadful!" and her cheeks grew white at the mere horror of the thought.



“ Well, come back with me at once. I shall scarcely believe you are safe till I have got you under my roof.”

“ Dear Lady Grenville, why did you come yourself ? ” said Brenda, kissing her hand affectionately, as she knelt beside her.

“ I couldn’t help it. I had suffered such tortures on your account ; it was impossible to rest at home. I sent the others to bed, and came off at once. Your messenger never arrived till past twelve ; and if it had not been for your note, no one would have made out what he meant. Get your things, child. How funny you look, to be sure ! ”

Mrs. Sanderson’s step was heard on the stairs, and presently the frill of her night-cap came round the door. She drew back in amazement at the sight of Lady Grenville, in her pretty evening dress, seated in the centre of the disordered room ; and retired into the kitchen to assist the young lady into her clothes, and ask the particulars of the late affray. When she heard that the door was really broken in, her indignation knew no bounds, and she stalked into the parlour, unmindful of her own extraordinary attire, picked up the broken bits of wood from the floor, moaned over the shattered hinges, and adjured Lord Ravenhill and Lady Grenville to see her righted before the law.

Basil consoled her with filthy lucre, whilst Lady Grenville promised that she would ask Sir Robert's advice. Then Brenda emerged from the kitchen, looking more like her former self in her own garments, and Lord Ravenhill, with a sigh of relief, handed the ladies into the brougham, and took his place on the back seat.

"I don't know how we shall get home," said Lady Grenville. "We came through the most dreadful places; and I believe every spring of the carriage is done for."

"Then you must send the bill in to me."

"Why—when it was all my fault?"

"How do you know that?" he asked in surprise.

"I shall never forget it," she said, with a shudder, as she sank among the cushions.

For the rest of the drive they were silent, Brenda sleeping quietly by Lady Grenville's side.

The dawn was breaking over the tops of the pines, as the carriage drove up at the gates of Castle Trant. Every window on the eastern side was ablaze with the glory of the heavens, but as they drove round by the northern front of the quadrangular pile of buildings, the aspect looked cold and grey. The door was thrown open by Sir Robert himself, who kissed his wife

first, Brenda next, and grasped Basil warmly by the hand.

“Come in ; come in,” he said hospitably, as if they meant to stay outside ; and they followed him into the enormous hall, where the gas looked pale in the face of day.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

“COULD YOU BE TRUE?”

Yes, he would go away to-morrow, not a day later. If he stayed here, he might drift into matrimony before he knew it; and as he had long ago come to the conclusion that woman's constancy was a thing of the past, he would rather drown himself in the Spey than face its risks. But ‘*l'homme propose, et femme dispose.*’”

In thus making his plans, Lord Ravenhill had counted without his hostess; and she had no idea of letting him slip, when she had taken so much trouble in getting hold of him, as he now found out when he sauntered into her boudoir the next morning, and quietly announced his intention.

“If you go, you will be very unkind;” and her face grew rosy-red with vexation.

“What, do you mean? You can't care about my staying, when you have got such lots of friends with you, and plenty of others *en route.*”

“After what happened last night, I think

you would be showing a dreadful want of consideration ; ” and she bent her head, having lost a stitch in her knitting.

“ Towards whom ? I don’t understand.” He looked quite bewildered, as he leant against the cretonne-covered mantelpiece.

“ You know as well as I do.”

“ Upon my honour, I don’t.”

“ Is it fair to single one girl out from the rest, to talk to her for hours when you won’t speak a word to any one else, to make her think that you like her better than any of the girls here—and then to run away ? ”

“ You are saying all this out of perversity. You don’t mean it, and you don’t think it.”

“ Don’t I ? Is it fair to wheedle yourself into a girl’s confidence, to teach her to form her opinions from the colour of your own, to make yourself her special friend in such a conspicuous manner that every one remarks it—and then to run away ? ”

“ Excuse me, but you are talking nonsense.”

“ Is it fair to keep a young thing out for a whole night, and then to run away for fear of the consequences ? ”

“ Beatrice ! ” His eyes flashed fire, and he drew himself up to his full height.

“ Well, that is what you have done, and what you are proposing to do,” she said firmly.

"Isn't it rather hard to send two people in a wrong direction, and then blame them for staying out?" he said, trying to speak calmly, as he was addressing a woman.

She blushed furiously, but stood to her guns. "At least, you might have left Brenda at the inn, and come on at once."

"A man, who has just been nearly drowned, requires a little time before he can undertake a ten-mile walk; and besides that, when I was going to start, I found some poachers lurking outside the door, and I was obliged to stay where I was to protect Miss Havergel."

"Of course, I knew that you had not done it on purpose; but the consequences are just as awkward."

"I don't see it," he said drily. "Few people would go out of the way to imagine that Miss Havergel and I nearly drowned ourselves, for the pleasure of the thing."

"Perhaps not," she admitted, as she studied the heel of her sock and counted the stitches carefully; "but you know how the simplest actions are misconstrued. And the whole story sounds like a chapter out of a novel."

"I should like to see the man who would dare to disbelieve me!" and he threw back his head, haughtily.

"Or the woman either," she laughed.

"Please don't get on your high horse, Basil, or I cannot speak a word."

"I did not mean to. But confess that you have said enough to anger me."

"I suppose I have. The truth is often unpleasant."

"The truth!" he said scornfully. "You pile up a huge fabric of invention on the tiniest substratum of fact, and then dub the whole building, truth."

She shook her head. "Pardon me. If you think I exaggerate, I only wish you could have heard what the others were saying last night."

"They may talk themselves hoarse for all I care," he rejoined provokingly, just when she was dying to be asked what it was.

"It ought to concern you for Miss Havergel's sake," she said loftily.

"Then tell me what it was, if it is necessary for me to know."

"There was Gordon with his, 'Well, I never! they must have had a good long spoon by this time;' Major Evans with his, 'I should think so! time for a courtship, and a marriage as well;' whilst even dear old Sir Robert muttered in an audible aside, when your messenger arrived from the inn at Loch Allan, '*Que diable font ils dans cette galère*'?"

"I care nothing for Gordon's nonsense; but

I think both he and Evans might have had more respect for your guest."

"My dear Basil, boys will talk; the pity is, when they have anything like this to talk about;" and her tone was quite severe.

"You are saying all this with an object," he said, after a pause, as he placed himself in front of her. "Will you kindly tell me what it is?"

Thus brought to bay, Lady Grenville put down her work, and looked him frankly in the face. "Brenda Havergel's happiness, and your own honour."

"Her happiness and my honour!" he repeated slowly, a slight colour rising in his cheeks.

"Yes. I would not have gone so far if you had not forced me;" and, anxious not to spoil the effect she had produced, by saying too much, with more prudence than is common to her sex, she rose from her seat and quietly walked out of the room.

Left alone, Lord Ravenhill threw himself down on the sofa, and, stooping forward, rested his forehead in his hands. Had it come to this—that he *must* marry, whether he would or no? If he had never loved Flora Tremayne, he might have taken this girl of his own free choice; but having done so, he had ceased to look upon any woman as a possible wife. Once deceived, he



expected to be deceived again. He regarded every woman with the same distrustful eyes. However seemingly honest and true, he could not trust her; for Flora had seemed the most guileless thing upon earth, and she had betrayed him. Why should Brenda Havergel's eyes be more truthful than hers? They looked innocent enough, but not more innocent than hers. His power of faith was gone; how, then, could he marry? How could he give his honour into hands, which, however soft and delicately fashioned, might throw it away in the whirlpool of sudden passion?

An hour had passed, whilst he meditated after the way of a modern misogynist. There came a gentle tap at the door, and a small head, with an aureole of gold, was thrust in and quickly withdrawn.

"Miss Havergel!" he exclaimed impulsively, though he scarcely knew what he meant to say to her.

Arrested in her wish to fly, she stood blushing in the doorway. "I thought Lady Grenville was here."

"And I scared you away. Pray come in."

She shut the door, and advanced slowly across the carpet, as if she were anxiously considering its pattern.

He got up and placed a chair for her, an

unexpected action, which caused her to sit down against her will ; and the moment she had done so, she regretted it.

"I hope you feel none the worse for your adventures last night?" he began, with studied politeness, as he played with a small china shepherdess on the mantelpiece.

"Not at all ;" and she in turn fidgeted with the fringe of the little work-table by her side.

"You would never have undertaken the walk, if you had known what you would have to go through?" he said, with the object of finding out whether she considered that it would throw the slightest shadow on her future.

"I would go through it all over again to-morrow," she said enthusiastically. "You don't know how delightful it is to have an adventure to look back upon, in an uneventful life like mine."

"Then you were not quite miserable all the time?"

"The walk down the mountain, with the splendid views on every side, was charming ; I shall never forget it. The dreadful-looking glen, with the dark hollows amongst its crags ; the white foam of the torrent, with the gloomy forest beyond ; the purple campion on the hill ; the soft green grass of the meadows—I shall have it always like a picture before my eyes, as long as my life lasts."

He smiled at her enthusiasm. "And the row on the loch—did you enjoy that?"

"More than anything else at first, till the danger came."

"And when you found yourself in the water?"

"I was terrified till you caught hold of me."

"And then you were reassured?"

"Yes," she said softly. "I knew I could trust you."

"I would give anything in the world, if I could say the same to you," he burst out, with some agitation in his voice.

"Why?" and her own voice trembled.

"Once in my life I was deceived by a woman—most cruelly deceived—and I have lost my faith in her sex. I would give my right hand to get it back."

Brenda answered nothing. He came closer, his face working with emotion.

"Do you feel it in you to be true to a man till death—whatever the temptation?"

"Lord Ravenhill!" She cast one glance of indignant surprise into his face; then her eyes drooped, and she became very pale.

Still he hesitated, as if the final plunge were difficult.

"I think I will go after Lady Grenville." She rose from her chair; but her strength

seemed to forsake her, and she leant upon the table to steady herself.

"No; stay." He caught hold of her shaky little hands, and kept her a prisoner. "Look at me, Brenda;" and against her will, she raised her frightened eyes to his, which seemed to chain them with their piercing gaze. "Could you be true to *me*?" Her kindling face spoke for her silent lips. "Then will you be my wife?"

Again there was no answer; but in another moment her face was buried in his chest, as he drew her gently to him like a frightened bird.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## AFRAID OF SUCCESS.

THERE is a terror in success when it crowns your feeble expectations on a sudden, and the object you have worked for is realized, without any further effort on your part. Lady Grenville's breath was taken away when she found that her words had reaped the fullest harvest, without an hour's delay ; and for the second time, a doubt crossed her mind as to whether the right had been hers to force on an event which might, if it failed to secure the happiness of her two friends, as she hoped, ensure the misery of their coupled lives. Ousted from her boudoir by her own strategy, she took refuge in the southern drawing-room, a cheerful room, hung with some of the finest specimens of Jamieson's brush, and furnished after an antique style to suit the dark oak panelling of the walls. Persian mats were strewn about the polished floor, their bright colours contrasting well with the carved wood

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of the furniture, which shone with almost ebony blackness in the light of the setting sun, streaming in through a castellated window at the end of the room. In spite of the warmth of the weather, a small fire of scented logs burnt in the grate, and made a pleasant crackling sound as it scattered its white ashes on the painted tiles.

A snowy bearskin was stretched before the fireplace, and, with her toes nestling in its white fur, sat Lady Grenville in her favourite lounging-chair, her colly's black nose on her lap, a work-basket and a novel on a table beside her. The house was very silent. The men of the party had gone early in the morning to a distant moor, and Mrs. Dynevor had charitably offered to chaperone the Miss Chamberlains to a luncheon amongst the heather. The field having thus been cleared for her operations, Lady Grenville had said her say, and then decamped, leaving it to her cousin's chivalry to do the rest. Knowing that he was most quixotically sensitive as to his honour, she thought she had said enough to alarm him; but his rooted distrust of woman was an obstacle she acknowledged it would be hard to get over. Hardened and embittered by the experience of the past, he was no longer to be influenced by a charming smile, or she might have trusted to Brenda's personal attractions to do the work for

her; but there must be something more than these to break the chain of habit, and to melt the iron of a resolute will. Basil's was a splendid character warped by a girl's want of faith. Would Brenda Havergel's devotion be sufficient to restore it to its former beauty, and mellow its strength with something of its past sweetness?

It seemed doubtful even to her prejudiced eyes, which wished to see so differently; and, discouraged by her reflections, Lady Grenville's lids closed, and she forgot her doubts in the natural drowsiness consequent on her exertions of the night before. She did not know how long she had slept, when she was roused by the opening of the door, as Lord Ravenhill stalked in. His face was very pale, and there was a look in his eyes as if his feelings had been stirred to their depths, as he placed himself before her.

"Well?" she said, breathlessly; for she could see that something important was coming.

"I have done it." He turned away from her as he spoke, and leant in his favourite attitude against the mantelpiece.

Lady Grenville sat bolt upright, her features assuming an expression of the keenest interest. "What do you mean?"

"That I've been a fool—and a gentleman, after your own pattern."

"You have not proposed to Brenda Haver-gel?" and at the moment she almost thought she did not wish it.

"I have asked a girl to marry me, when there is not a woman in the world whom I can trust." He frowned darkly at the glowing embers as he spoke. "But be content; I have done my duty, and *not* run away."

"Oh, Basil!" and she clasped her hands in agitation.

A great dread came over her. Never in her life had she seen him like this before, and for the first time she began to gauge the depths of bitterness in his heart—bitterness which had been increasing as the years rolled by, till all the sweetness of his manhood was turned to gall.

"And don't you love her?" she said timidly, after a pause.

"Rather late in the day"—with a short laugh—"to ask me that. Love never appeared as a moving power amongst your string of arguments. I was to make an offer, that was all that you insisted upon; my happiness was left out of the matter, and my future peace not worth a moment's thought."

"But of course I thought you loved her, or I never would——"

"Excuse me, it is too late to ask. Miss



Havergel is the future Lady Ravenhill. You have attained your object, so be content." And with that he left her, terrified, as we have said, by her success.

She would have given her best diamond necklace to find herself once more on that spur of the Grampians, where they lunched yesterday, with all her special pleadings left unsaid. Again and again, she vowed that she would never try her hand at match-making after this lesson. Terribly uneasy as to the fate which she had prepared for Brenda, she dreaded to see her blushing raptures, and, stealing out of the windows, she climbed up the high terraced bank behind the castle, and hid herself in a grove of pines. She despised herself for her cowardice, as she raised her troubled eyes to the glories of the sunset; but she felt that she really needed some time for reflection, before she could resume her part as hostess when her tardy guests returned.

What was to be done? Nothing. As *she* had sown, so Brenda must reap. Horribly unjust, but the inevitable consequence of successful interference in the lives of others. Her success—what a mockery it was!—the almost certain misery of two people, who had wound themselves round her heart. She would have gone through a good deal to spare either of them a

sorrow, and she had gone out of her way to present it to both, with open hands. She wondered at her own folly as she thought of it. Preoccupied with the advantage of Lord Ravenhill's marriage, and the necessity of an heir to his title and estates, she had taken her own favourite young friend—a girl whom she had grown fond of during the last fortnight—and sacrificed her to this object, without a single qualm of conscience. How careful she would be for the future—when it was too late! The sun sank low behind the forest, a dark shadow fell upon the pines, and, with a small shiver, she rose from her seat on the stump of a tree, and slowly descended the bank. At the foot of it, she came face to face with Lord Ravenhill.

"You here, Beatrice!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Come back again for a moment on to the terrace."

"The dressing-bell has rung, and I shall be late."

"Never mind. After the important events of to-day, dinner seems a thing of no consequence."

He drew her hand within his arm, and she consented to be led back up the slope.

"I behaved like a ruffian to you just now; I left you under the impression that you had entrapped Miss Havergel into a sort of Blue-

beard affair, which would bring her young head to death or humiliation. And all this, simply because I felt in a rage with myself for having been cajoled into making an offer, for which honestly I knew that there was no moral necessity. It galled me to think that, in a petty quarter of an hour, I had broken every resolution, the fruit of years of sober reflection. If there is one thing I hate more than another, it is to be weak."

"You never were that, Raven——"

"Not till to-day."

"Not then. You conquered yourself, in order to do what was right; and that is what I call true strength."

"Strength to give way to a woman's tongue, and not to your own convictions?"

"If your convictions had not been the same as mine, you would not have acted as you did."

"I was carried away; I lost my balance; and just at that moment, fate sent Miss Havergel to the door. She was going to run away, but, for no reason on earth, I made her come in."

Lady Grenville smiled. "And where is she now, poor little thing?"

"Gone to her room. I think I frightened her out of her wits, for she was as white as your handkerchief when I let her go. I am not fitted for love-making, and I was too abrupt."

"The more abrupt the better. Nothing is so trying to the nerves as a long preamble."

"But she is so terribly inexperienced. How will she comport herself as Lady Ravenhill? I feel so entirely in the dark."

"Of course you do"—with a light laugh. "Until preliminary canters are allowed in matrimony, men *must* be in the dark as to what their wives will do."

"If she plunges into fashionable life, like an otter in a stream; if she flirts with every fellow that lets her know she is pretty; if she never rests at home for a quiet evening, but is always trying to drag me out to some reception or ball—what am I to do? If I check her, she will think me a brute; if I don't, I shall go raving mad."

"Nonsense; Brenda is a sensible little thing, accustomed to the quietest life possible. One party a week would seem unprecedented gaiety."

"Ah! the quieter the beginning, the noisier the end. The daughters of country rectors are proverbially faster than any others."

"Brenda won't be fast, unless you drive her into it by coldness or neglect," said Lady Grenville, feeling her ground.

"I shan't do that. Beatrice!" He stopped, and went on earnestly, "You know that this marriage is none of my seeking. If evil comes

of it, it will be your fault, not mine. But I will add this to comfort you," he said, with a smile. "If I had intended to marry, Brenda Havergel is the girl I should have chosen. She is the dearest little thing I ever saw, and, God helping me, I trust to make her happy."

Lady Grenville pressed his hand warmly, and walked back through the gardens, now chilly with falling dews, with a far lighter heart than when she came out. Surely she might trust Brenda to Lord Ravenhill's care, without grieving over the fancied shadows of the future.

## CHAPTER XX.

### PRUDENT COUNSELS.

BACK again in the bosom of her own family, safe from the inquisitive eyes of Ruthella Chamberlain, and Gordon Grenville's impudent chaff, Brenda Havergel breathed freely; and the cheeks, which had been scorched by an almost permanent blush, resumed the delicate tint which was natural to them. It is needless to enter into the feelings of maternal pride with which Mrs. Havergel folded her child to her heart. The pleasure, like all earthly joys, was mixed with pain, for however splendid the destiny which lay before her, it would be hard to miss her bright face from the family circle. The neighbourhood crowded to the door in a flutter of congratulation, and were surprised at the quiet dignity with which the widow talked of her daughter's engagement. She seemed to forget the peer in the virtues of the man, and prided herself much more on his high character, than on his title.

Of course her motherly vanity was pleased by the fact that a man of high birth had selected her child before all others—it was a tribute to Brenda's charms, which she was not slow to appreciate; but she would rather have married her to a man in her own sphere—Arthur Wilson, for instance, the son of a barrister, who lived about a mile from Jessamine Lodge.

Edith, who was dying for a gossip, carried Brenda off to a seat under the willow, as soon as her things were unpacked, and placed in drawer or cupboard. They both had a piece of work in their hands, for life at the Lodge was nothing if not industrious, but tongues went faster than needles in the interest of the one absorbing subject.

"Now, tell me, Bren; you promised you always would," began Edith, in her eager search after details. "What did he say? I am dying to know?"

"Oh, not much; people never do."

"How do you know? Well, just tell me how he began"—coaxingly. "I suppose he asked you, if you loved him?"

"Indeed he didn't;" and she blushed furiously, as she stooped over her work.

"Dear! How very odd! I *always* thought they did that. It doesn't sound like an offer at all. Perhaps it wasn't."

"I wish you wouldn't talk such nonsense."

"Well, how am I to judge if you won't tell me? You always promised you would!"—approachfully.

"But I didn't know that I should ever have me."

"Of course you didn't; but you must keep our word just the same," said Edith, inexorably. Besides, it might be of use to me in the future, and save me from making the same mistake as Miss Clara Wilkinson, who went home blushing because Mr. Malison had made her an offer. Days passed, and no lover appeared, so Wilkinson *père* went to look him up; and lo and behold! he vowed that Miss W. had misconstrued his words, and he had only meant to express a wish for her friendship. Home went the father, feeling rather a fool, and shook his head at his still more foolish daughter. In consequence of which she suddenly developed an attack of bronchitis or neuralgia, I forget which it was, and has kept her room ever since. Do you remember her zebra-like garment at Rookwood?"

Brenda nodded. Did she not remember every incident of that day, when she first spoke to her lover, and he made the time fly on enchanted wings?

"Ah! if Mary hadn't had a headache, you



would never have known Lord Ravenhill. How you ought to have blessed that headache, to be sure, instead of grumbling at it, as you did."

"I know I did," she answered, with unexpected humility; "but if I had known what were to be the consequences, I think I should have been afraid to go."

"If we always knew what was going to happen, we should be afraid of moving a step," observed Edith, oracularly. "But go on with your story. I don't suppose he plumped out, 'Be my wife,' without any preface."

"Of course not. He asked me a few questions."

"Whether you were honest, sober, steady, and obliging, just like a housemaid. Finding the answer satisfactory, he remarked, 'I think you will do,' and embraced you on the spot."

"I won't stay out here another minute; you are so dreadfully disagreeable;" and Brenda gathered up her work, as if for flight. But Edith pounced upon it, and pushed her back on to the grass.

"Sit there, and I won't tease you again. Oh, Bren, it is very good of me to pretend to like it, but I don't know what I shall do without you," she said lamentably.

"You won't be without me. I shall have you up to town to stay with me, and will take

you wherever you want to go. We will go to the theatre every day of the week, and on Sundays we will find out all the celebrated preachers whom we have longed to hear. Oh, Edith, it will be very nice, won't it, to do everything we have pined to do, for all these years?"

"Yes, Bren, if we could go about together, you and I—you with the cash and the impudence, and I with the common sense and prudence—we might be awfully jolly; but if we had to have a third in the shape of that formidable Lord Ravenhill, it would spoil everything. I don't mean to be rude, or to say anything against him; but he is beautiful to look at, as a picture by Murillo, and as difficult to get on with, as a mummy."

"If you only knew him!"—with a pitying smile.

"I don't want to. You mustn't be offended, Bren, but if you *will* bring a heavy swell into the family, you must expect your poor sisters to be crushed by him. Mamma is calling you, so I suppose you must go. What a bore!"

All through the long winter, the sisters stitched diligently at the uninteresting items of the trousseau. Their finances were strained to the utmost to provide the materials, so the work had to be done by their own fingers. Edith did the lion's share, and turned out some of the

dresses with a style and finish, borrowed from Élise. Lady Grenville gave the wedding-dress, a gorgeous garment of white velvet, fit for Lord Ravenhill's bride, and with infinite tact and delicacy, contrived to help them in many ways without hurting their feelings. One day she brought a lovely piece of *brochée* silk, which she had bought by mistake. Another time it was a piece of cashmere, which she could not make use of, because grey was so very unbecoming to her; or a bonnet, which her milliner had sent her contrary to orders, etc. She gave Basil an invitation to come down to Rookwood whenever he wished to see his *fiancée*, knowing that it would be more convenient to Brenda to meet him there, than to receive him in her own tiny home. All this she did, and more also to appease her conscience, which continued to prick her whenever she was depressed, on account of that walk through forest and glen, which had led to such important results. If the marriage answered as ill as so many marriages of the present day, through woman's vanity, or man's neglect, would she ever forgive herself? She thought not; and she shuddered sometimes at the thought.

Mrs. Torrington, after having declared that she would rather her brother had espoused the daughter of a charwoman than not marry at

all, grumbled over his marriage with Brenda Havergel, as if she had not entreated Lady Grenville to bring it about. But as she never was contented with anybody or anything for more than two days together, no one was surprised; only Basil begged her to keep her regrets to herself, if she did not wish to quarrel with him. In consequence of which, she grumbled in confidence to all her friends, but put a smiling face on the matter whenever he appeared. He knew what her real sentiments were, but they did not affect him. He was too much accustomed to standing alone, to disquiet himself much about the opinions of others. If he had once resolved on a course of action, he was not easily induced to change it; but if he found out that he was mistaken, and was forced to change it in consequence, he had none of that meanness in his character which hesitates to own itself at fault.

Gradually he became more and more attracted by his betrothed. He could not fall in love with her, as in the old days he had fallen, so hopelessly, with Flora Tremayne. It seemed as if the power of beating rapturously had gone from his heart, and as if its capacity for conceiving an ardent passion for any human being, had been taken from him at twenty-five. He could only love like an elderly man, with a

steady affection, at a moderate temperature; the fire of youth was extinct. Perhaps, like some crater, warranted silent for centuries, it would speak once more in living flame, and overwhelm the whole fabric of his happiness in sudden ruin. Such things had been, and what has been may be again, except the deluge. At present his feelings were decidedly the reverse of volcanic, but the lava might be generating beneath the calm exterior; and if Flora Trevellyan or Brenda Havergel stirred the dead embers into life, according as it were the one or the other, so would run the course of the latter's married life, through the storm of conflicting passions, or the sunshine of content.

Lady Grenville did all that lay in her power to avert the clouds of the future. She gently suggested to Brenda that an extra amount of caution was necessary in the wife, when the husband's faith in woman had received a severe shock. Conduct that might seem perfectly excusable in other women, and to other men, would appear to Lord Ravenhill as bordering on flippant, frivolous flirtation; and that he would never stand.

"But I never have flirted in all my life," said Brenda, simply; "and I certainly should not begin when I was married."

"Many women do, my dear. You cannot

tell till the temptation comes. I know by my own feelings when I first married, how easy it is to begin with a pleasant friendship, to be led on into sentiment, and how difficult it is to draw back, before the man goes too far."

"But as a married woman I shall feel so important."

"Which will make you feel so safe that you will see no danger; and that, believe me, is the most dangerous position of all. Basil will have a number of male friends, who will think it polite to pay court to his young wife. Most of them will seem strangely fascinating after the dull set of men down here; and you will enjoy their lively chaff and fun, and think it the most innocent enjoyment in the world. They will tell you in a thousand ways that they think you charming; by their remarks on the toilettes of other women, they will incite you to out-rival them, until you get to dress to please them, and not your husband."

"Lady Grenville!"—indignantly.

"When you put on your bonnet, you will remember that 'So and So' said it was the prettiest he had ever seen; when you order a new dress, you will take care to have it of the shade that somebody else pronounced to be most charming; when you meet the young men in the Row, you will challenge their admira-

tion; and when you drive home, you will have engaged to wear a certain toilette in the evening."

"What must you think of me to talk like that?" and angry tears started into Brenda's eyes. "Why should I be odious and disgusting, just because I ought to be the reverse?"

"I only tell you what other women do, and glory in it, too. They have struggled to the front by their beauty, and they air it on all occasions like an order of merit. They do not belong to the upper ten, naturally, so they know nothing of the sentiment '*noblesse oblige*'; the traditions of the past have no restraining influence; they imagine that the great thing in life is to be conspicuous; and she who has the longest train of admirers, has reached the apotheosis of triumph. You are not like them, dear Brenda; you are no *parvenue* with insolent manners and impudent tongue; but example is contagious, and at the first step into the world, you may take a prominent and disagreeable minority for a specimen of modern society. Don't be angry with me, dear. I was very young when I married Sir Robert, and I know by experience what are the temptations of a young married woman, although they were not so great in my day, as they are in yours. And now I must go. Basil is coming down to-

morrow for a day's shooting, so I will send the carriage for you early in the morning. You won't hate me, after all my sermonizing?" and she patted Brenda's cheeks affectionately. "I feel it my duty, dear, or I would not worry you."

After many affectionate adieux, she stepped into her carriage, which had been waiting at the door of Jessamine Lodge for an unconscionable time, and drove back to Rookwood, wrapped in furs, and comfortable reflections of duty done.

If Lady Ravenhill went astray, it would not be for want of good advice.



## CHAPTER XXI.

## THE FIRST TEMPTATION.

"WELL, Charlie, what do you think? I am just off to St. James's Street, to have a confab with your brother-in-law," said Captain Balfour, throwing open the door of Tremayne's sitting-room, one morning in December.

"The deuce you are! Get him to lend me some money, and I'll swear you are a trump." Charlie cast down the pen he was writing with, and threw himself back in his chair. "I didn't know that he was over here. Very uncivil of him not to drop me a line!"

"Only here for a couple of days. Wants me to carry on the negotiation with Moss about that horse. I should like to let him in for a hundred or two over the price, and pocket the difference. Such a bore to have been born honest; it clogs a man so."

"Some people get over it with their first teeth."

"Yes," returned his friend absently, as he sat down on a chair, on the opposite side of the writing-table.

"What is it, old fellow?" remarked Charlie, after a pause, during which he had written two or three lines. "You don't look up to the mark."

"I'm right enough"—with a careless shrug of his shoulders. "Only the luck's against me, as it always is."

"Anything fresh?"

"Nothing. Only it is enough to drive a fellow mad to see the sweetest girl on earth wear herself out with waiting, when it would be heaven to have her, and——" The rest of the sentence was inaudible, as it disappeared in a rumble under his black moustaches.

After a little further conversation, principally about horses, Balfour took himself off, and, walking rapidly down Jermyn Street, turned the corner into St. James's Street, and rang at the door of Sir Philip Trevelyan's lodgings. He was admitted at once, and shown into the front room, where he found the diplomat busily writing, with his cheque-book lying on his desk.

With the attraction that money, or anything that represents money, has for the impecunious, Captain Balfour's eyes riveted themselves at once on the cheque-book.

Sir Philip rose, and, shaking his hand cordially, thanked him very much for his early visit. "The truth is," he said, drawing forward a chair for his guest, "I am very anxious to secure a suitable horse for my wife before I go back to Rome to-morrow evening, and I have but little time to spare." He turned to the writing-table as he spoke, and, having filled in a cheque, tore it off and placed it in his pocket-book, which he was about to put into his pocket; but, changing his mind, left it lying on the desk.

"So much depends upon Lady Trevellyan's riding. Has she a light hand? For, from what I am told, Quicksilver requires delicate handling. The curb drives him mad."

"You needn't be afraid;" and he threw himself down in a lounging-chair, with a cigarette between his fingers. "Nothing will induce Lady Trevellyan to ride with a curb. She has a light hand, a straight seat, and fears nothing. Horses seem to take to her, as if they recognized a kindred spirit. Won't you smoke?" and he pushed his cigar-case across the table.

"Thanks. This tobacco is perfect. May I ask where you get it?"

"We get them in thousands from Salonica. I and another fellow club together; but I don't think the last lot is up to the first. I intended to write and blow the man up, but it escaped

my memory. There are so many letters I must write, that the unnecessary ones go to the wall. What do you think of Bruce's chance for the Derby?"

Captain Balfour made a face. "He stands very well at present; but the touts say he is a roarer. If so, he will go down with a run, and the odds will be in favour of Shotover, unless something brilliant comes out of the American stable."

"Don't they think anything of the French horse? As I passed through Paris, Count L—— was crowing like twenty cocks."

"Very weedy. He is not much fancied in the market; but we shall see better a little later on. Now Passaic is a sure thing for the 'City and Sub.'"

"You don't say so? I must bear that in mind. I hope to be over here for the Derby; but I shall hardly manage the Spring Meeting. I don't know if it is better for a man's pocket to be at a distance, or on the spot. In the one case you are apt to leap in the dark, without the advantage of side-winds, and in the other, you are tempted to put your money on everything that looks likely. When can I see Quicksilver?"

"To-morrow morning at twelve, if that suits you."

"Capitally. I confess I should like to see

him myself, although I dare say you are a far better judge than I am."

"Of course you would. Besides, in matters of horseflesh, it is said that no man should trust his brother."

"Talking of brothers reminds me of my brother-in-law. Do you see as much of him as you used to?"

"Nearly every other day when I am in town."

"Then perhaps you will be kind enough to tell him that I had no time to look him up, and that I am off to-morrow by the 8.20 from Victoria. But I forgot, though; I shall be pretty sure to see him at the F.O."

At that moment his valet opened the door, and said that somebody wished to speak to him at once. He was waiting down below.

"Excuse me for a minute, Balfour; I shall be back directly;" and Sir Philip hurried out of the room.

Left alone, Captain Balfour's eyes roamed round the room in careless scrutiny of its luxurious furniture. Here were gathered the various *objets d'art* which the diplomat had collected during his sojourn in foreign cities. Curiosities from the bazaar at Constantinople, quaint bits of *bric-à-brac* from the Jews' shops in Berlin, pictures and old brocaded curtains

from Rome and Lisbon, etc. Strewn about the room in picturesque disorder, they gave it a peculiar character of its own, which Angus Balfour fully appreciated. Mentally contrasting it with his own Bloomsbury lodging, he thought how he should like to have a place like this to receive his Kate in. Of course a few alterations would have to be made in the decorations over the mantelpiece. Pipes, yataghans, and Moorish daggers, changed for a looking-glass, or brackets with delicate china.

His face clouded as he thought of her. Whenever he came to a rich man's house, he always girded at the injustice of his fate, as if he had a right to claim a competence at the hands of Providence, and had somehow been cheated out of it. As his eyes travelled slowly towards the desk, and stopped at the cheque-book lying there, it came across his mind like a lightning flash how easy it would be to take possession of a blank cheque, and fill it in for any amount he chose to fix on. The handwriting could be copied from a note which he had received that morning from Sir Philip. He had always found it remarkably easy to imitate the caligraphy of others; he had only to do it now, and Kate would be his.

He turned away and tried to think of other things, but the insidious temptation held pos-

session of his mind. Two thousand was a small sum to Sir Philip; in fact, he would scarcely miss it. The loss of it would not cost him a single luxury of his self-indulgent life; whilst to him, Angus Balfour, it would be the wide step from a hope, so small that it had almost dwindled into despair, to the actual glory of fruition.

Without allowing himself one moment for hesitation, he walked with a resolute step towards the desk, opened the book, turned over the leaves with cold deliberation, selected a leaf towards the end, where its absence was less likely to be noticed, tore it out, examined it closely, and bit his lip. As Sir Philip spent so much of his life on the Continent, he had his cheques made "to order" for convenience of transmission. This would complicate matters to a degree which Balfour had not contemplated, and necessitate the forging of a second name besides Sir Philip's signature.

There was a ring at the front door, followed by quick steps on the staircase, a tap, and Charlie Tremayne hurried into the room. Balfour was standing by the window, with the cheque safely secreted in his pocket when the other came in.

"Where's Trevellyan?"

"Downstairs with a friend."

a nuisance! I haven't a moment to

stay, for I am awfully late as it is. Will you give him this little parcel for my sister? It is nothing, only I just wanted to show I hadn't forgotten her."

"All right; put it on the table," he said, without turning round. Would he ever again be able to look any one in the face?

"What's the matter? Anything up out there?" said Charlie, curiously, struck by his friend's apparent absorption.

"Yes; there's a girl very like Miss Dynevor. The carriage has just stopped at Salviati's. If you are very quick, you may see her."

Off went Tremayne like a shot, for the young lady in question was one of his many divinities. When he was gone, Captain Balfour drew a deep breath.

"The suspicion will lie between that boy and me. What lucky chance sent him here to share it? If I could get out of the house without being heard, no one would know which was here last. It is worth chancing. Trevelyan would never prosecute his own brother-in-law."

Still white as death, he drew a card from his case, and scribbled on it, "So sorry to be obliged to go, but have an appointment." He laid it on the table; then, catching up his hat, he crept with stealthy steps across the Turkey carpet out of the door. On the landing he



stood still to listen, his heart beating like his Kate's when he first kissed her. Voices were audible in the room downstairs—Sir Philip's and another. Fearful of waiting too long, he crept down the stairs, the moisture still upon his brow, and scarcely ventured to breathe until he stood outside in the street, with the door closed noiselessly behind him.

He seemed to have passed through a lifetime since he last entered that doorway, only one short half-hour ago, an innocent man. Guilty he had been of venial faults by the million, but never had he stooped to such a temptation as this. The eyes of every man he met seemed to fix themselves on him in a curious stare, seemed to penetrate through cloth and leather to the blank cheque in his pocket. Was it made of iron that it weighed him down, and took all elasticity out of his walk? He had never fancied that the gulf between crime and innocence was so wide as this. If he filled it in and used it, would he always be forced to walk with downcast eyes for the rest of his term of existence? He turned down a quiet street parallel with Oxford Street, for his thoughts were busy, and his brain dizzy. He wanted to think out the situation by himself, before he faced Kate's fond and trusting glance. He must get rid of the tangle of his thoughts, before he

could talk to her without restraint; he must banish the remembrance of the contemplated crime, or how could he tell her with proper rapture of the possibility of his being able to claim her before the end of a fortnight? He walked on hurriedly, with his hat drawn down over his black brows, and never noticed the streets he traversed, or the people who passed by him. Truly crime is an absorbing pursuit for those who engage in it!

By the time he entered the gilded gates of the museum, he had entirely forgotten all the many important little "businesses" which he had thought himself obliged to see after.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## A DINNER AT THE ST. JAMES'S.

MR. Moss's stables were within an easy distance of the Marble Arch. Captain Balfour was already there when Sir Philip Trevellyan made his appearance, only half an hour after the time named; but then diplomats are not so punctual in their habits as business men, and neither move nor think by clockwork.

The dealer, a fresh-looking man of about forty to forty-five, with cheeks as pink as a half-boiled lobster, came to meet him.

"Good morning, Mr. Moss," said Sir Philip, who, knowing that he had no time to spare, went straight to the point at once. "I have come to see the horse which Captain Balfour spoke of."

"Certainly, sir. He's quite ready for your inspection, and I'm not afraid of it either. Jem, bring the little brown out of No. 3; and look sharp."

The stable-boy hurried across the yard, and another minute the "little brown" was rought out and stood against the stable-wall, the best position to show off his points. He was certainly a shapely-looking animal—height about fifteen-one, very dark brown, with a tan muzzle, without a white hair, and a coat like satin.

"Is this horse sound and quiet?" said Sir Philip, after a pause, during which he had been scrutinizing it narrowly.

"Perfectly sound. His manners are so good that a child might ride him. As to soundness," and he patted him approvingly, "I warrant him all that. You've only got to look at his legs to see how clean they are; but you may have him examined, if you like."

"Thank you. I would rather do without it, as my time is so short. How old is he?"

Mr. Moss immediately showed him his mouth, as the usual guarantee that the horse was in his prime—rising six. After which, Jem was told to walk on. Quicksilver was first walked, and then trotted, Mr. Moss calling out angrily—

"Don't hang on his head like that. Let him go."

The horse seemed to step and go well, and Sir Philip, seeing that he was likely to suit, asked if he could carry a lady. Mr. Moss

answered for it that he could, but volunteered to have a saddle on him, and to let him be ridden by Jem, wrapped in a blanket, to serve the purpose of a habit, in order that the Baronet might judge for himself. They accordingly adjourned to the field, where hurdles were set up in readiness for the trial; and they saw the horse galloped and jumped over them, in both of which performances he acquitted himself well. The long easy stride with which he galloped was especially satisfactory.

Sir Philip came to the conclusion that it was just the horse for his wife—plenty of courage, as he could see by his eager eye, and, so far as he could tell, free from vice. He had better make up his mind to take it. After a short consultation with Captain Balfour, he intimated his intention to the dealer, and asked the price.

Mr. Moss informed him with alacrity that the price was two hundred for the general public, but, as a friend of the Captain's, he might have it for a hundred and eighty pounds. The figure was tolerably high, but it seemed to meet Sir Philip's views, for he went into the office to draw a cheque. Captain Balfour remained outside, the sight of a cheque being more distasteful to him at present than an unpaid bill. He was trying to make friends

with a snarling little terrier when Sir Philip came out, followed by Mr. Moss.

"Did you see Tremayne yesterday, when he was at my lodgings?"

"No. I left almost immediately, remembering that I had an appointment," he said coolly, though wondering what on earth had put it into Sir Philip's head to ask the question.

"He is coming to see me off to-night, and we are to have an early dinner at the club. Perhaps you will join us?" Trevellyan added, feeling that he owed him something for his good offices with regard to the horse.

Balfour excused himself on the plea of a previous engagement, and also declined the lift which Sir Philip offered, as he walked slowly down to his hansom, which was waiting at the gate.

"Good morning, Mr. Moss," he said, with a nod. "When I have more time I shall ask you to let me have a look round your stables." Then he threw himself back in the cab, with a sigh of relief. "Don't like Balfour, and never shall. Glad he isn't coming to spoil our little inner. Wish I had got somebody else to look at the horse; but there was no time. I must tell Flora that her old spoon has consoled himself; that is sure to interest her. A woman always keeps up her interest in those little affairs

of the past, whilst a man loses it directly the affair is over. That brother of hers is in a scrape, I could take my oath. I wish I could get him out of the way before Flora comes to London. I wonder if —— would let him go to Lisbon? I will sound him this afternoon." Soliloquizing thus, he pulled out his betting-book, and soon became immersed in its contents.

The little dinner at the St. James's went off very cheerfully. There were four F.O. men, besides Charlie Tremayne and Trevellyan—the Master of Strathrowan, who was best man at Sir Philip's wedding; Peere Sylvester, second secretary at Copenhagen; Godfrey Vivian, who spent more of his time in writing sonnets to fashionable beauties than in deciphering telegrams; and Lionel Westmacott, just fresh from Constantinople, with a fund of anecdote, and a tongue that never tired.

Dipping a walnut into his sherry, he stooped forward, his grey eyes twinkling irresistibly, his long upper lip twitching, and his roseate cheeks flushing into purple. "'Pon my honour, it is true; A—— told me so himself."

"What was that?" said Sir Philip, looking round.

"They won't believe me that any one under the rank of a reigning sovereign could brave the great Elchi; but I tell them that A—— did it.

He had more pluck than Abdul Aziz, and all his grand-viziers into the bargain. The first time he was sent for by his lordship, and not asked to sit down, he thought it was an oversight, and stood like a sentinel till the interview was over; but the next time, after looking suggestively at the row of chairs in the distance, and finding that Stratford did not take the hint, he quietly pushed away the papers on the writing-table and sat down on it, just under the old fellow's nose. Tolerable cheek, wasn't it?"

"Yes; but it's the way, after all, to treat a man who wants to snub you. Show him that you won't stand any nonsense, and he won't try it on. Ah, nothing will go right in the East till we have you ambassador to the Porte," said Sir Philip, with a smile. "Having served under the great Elchi himself for so many years, you would know how to tackle them, and exchange the cotton-wool policy of the present day for the iron discipline of the dear old lion."

"No, no; it would be beyond me," returned the other, with a shake of the head. "As a looker-on, I saw the whole of the game, it is true; but as a player, I might be no better than the rest."

"Bravo, humility! Allow me to offer you



a violet;" and the Master of Strathrowan extracted the one blossom which had adorned his coat, and presented it across the table with a grave bow.

There was a general laugh at Westmacott's expense; but, not in the least abashed, he fired off another anecdote about his favourite hero, more incredible than any that had preceded it.

"Can't swallow it," said Vivian, solemnly.

"Daresay not," growled Westmacott. "Digestion spoilt by your own detestable poetry."

"Anything fresh in that line?" asked Peere Sylvester, a small man with dove-like eyes and softly modulated tones. "Pray give it us."

"We won't mention names," said Sir Philip, with a smile, "but we all saw you yesterday in close propinquity to a certain yellow dress, so we can guess who inspires you."

Vivian, blushing furiously, helped himself to some Lafitte, and passed it on.

"How does it begin?" and Charlie Tremayne leant forward, with a mischievous look in his blue eyes.

"Oh, lady in yellow,  
Look round on a fellow,  
Who sighs for a glance of your eye.

"Just do as you are bid,  
And lift up a lid,  
Or, by Jove, I will lay down and die,"

finished Westmacott, amidst a shout of applause. "Very clever of me. Quite impromptu; no preparation, as the conjurors say."

"After that, Vivian can't refuse us his sonnet," said the Master, quietly, "or we shall think it inferior."

"Think it what you like, I certainly did not write it for your benefit."

"I expect it is something æsthetic," suggested Sylvester, "far above our heads; rather in this line—

"Spirit of beauty descended to earth,  
Sure in a sunflower love had its birth.  
Give me one leaflet to lay on my breast,  
And, rapt in its beauty, I yield thee the rest."

"'Yield thee the rest,' when he never had it," objected Sir Philip; "that won't do. And, besides, it can't be æsthetic, because I can almost understand it. But time is pressing, and I have a hundred things I want to say to you all. I conjure you, Westmacott, and you, Strathrowan, for old friendship's sake, to let me know directly you get a safe tip about the Derby. A hint about the Spring Meeting would not be despised; and, in fact, if anything turns up as to racing matters or promotion, just drop me a line."

The conversation took a more serious turn, and in a quarter of an hour three hansoms

were sent for, and the whole party adjourned to the Dover and Chatham platform of Victoria Station.

"Give my love to the 'Stars and Stripes,'" Westmacott called out, as they all stood round the door of the carriage, permitted to do so, as usual, when the continental train is about to start. "Tell her that if my next move is to Washington, I shall certainly ask her to accompany me."

"Rather dangerous. You will undoubtedly have to charter a second steamer for her boxes. They say when she arrived in Rome they took her, as a matter of course, for an actress, and addressed her as Mademoiselle Bernhardt."

"Just the thing to delight her. The only difference between them is, that one is paid, and the other isn't."

"The worse look-out for you."

"My love to Flora," said Charlie, in a low voice. "Tell her how awfully glad I am that she is coming in the spring;" and he gave Sir Philip's hand a warmer squeeze because he belonged to her.

"Good-bye; I'll tell her. She always wants to know everything about you. I say, a word in your ear. Don't have too much to do with that man Balfour. I don't trust him."

"Balfour! I'd trust him before half the

world;" and Tremayne drew back in sudden indignation.

"Then you are a fool for your pains!" muttered his brother-in-law, contemptuously. "Well, ta-ta, all of you. May we all have some luck in the new year."

The train moved slowly out of the station; the knot of friends dispersed. Charlie was the last to wave his hand, till Sir Philip's smooth, fair head disappeared within the window, and then he turned away with a sigh. A great longing was upon him for his sister. If he could have one look at her loving face, he felt as if it would do him such a world of good. And four or five long months must come and go before they met.

"Come along, Tremayne! Are you going to stand there all night?" Godfrey Vivian's voice sounded clear and shrill on the dusky platform, and roused him out of himself. "We propose to adjourn to the Criterion. They will just about have finished the first act."

Charlie hurried after him, and willingly accompanied the three friends to the theatre. He was always ready for anything in the way of amusement, and this night he was particularly anxious to shake off his unusual depression. He could not account for his abnormally low spirits. He was in debt, but that was nothing

new; he was without Flora, but that he always was, except when she paid a flying visit to London, or he went over to Paris when she was staying with the De Birons. It was like a presentiment of coming evil, for which he could not see the slightest reason; but, strive against it as he might, he could not get rid of it. When the play was over, he separated himself from his friends, on the plea of a headache, and strolled up Regent Street, down Piccadilly, and so on to Bryanstone Square. It seemed some comfort to him to look at the house which had been Flora's home as well as his own, during the first days of their orphanhood. He had abused Lady Jemima, spoken of her as spiteful behind her face, and made jokes about her under her nose; he had kicked against her efforts at control, and defied her authority in the impudent fashion of incipient manhood at eighteen; but he was fond of her, to a certain extent, after all, and would gladly have gone in and had a chat, or even a scolding, if the hour had been a little more *de règle* than one a.m. In fact, he yearned after any one that belonged to him, and walked off with another sigh, when a policeman seemed to take him for a burglar on the spree.

If Lady Jemima had only known that her disobedient nephew was standing outside in the

cold, raw night, in a repentant frame of mind, she would have got out of bed, without a moment's hesitation, and, in spite of rheumatism and bronchitis, popped her nightcap out of the window, and called him in. Charlie Tremayne, in a penitent mood, would have been a solace to her eyes, a comfort to her mind ; for had she not prophesied eternal perdition for him with sickening reiteration, and would not the first halt on the road have been as welcome as water in a desert ?

The lonely old woman, in consequence of the crust of harshness which had grown upon her with her solitary life, was misjudged by all who knew her. No one guessed the wells of tenderness, hidden so carefully under a cantankerous exterior, no one thought that she was capable of much affection ; so her love lay dormant, like an unclaimed treasure. If Charlie had but guessed it, and tried his chance once more, some of the evil which was in store for him might have been averted by her frail and wasted hands.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## CASHED.

A FOGGY day in January, when locomotion out of doors was decidedly depressing, and men, wherever they were, crowded round the nearest fire and dreaded the moment when they had to face the mirky atmosphere. Charlie Tremayne came out of the archway into Downing Street, drawing the collar of his ulster up to his ears. To his surprise, he was immediately accosted by Captain Balfour, who asked him if he were going home.

"Yes; I have got away earlier than usual, in order to dine down in the country. Pleasant day for that sort of thing. I wonder if they would think it awfully rude of me to shirk it?"

"I shouldn't ask them. No one but a postman or a lamplighter would think of being out on a day like this. Should you mind cashing this cheque for me? It would not be much out of your way, and I am afraid I shall not be in St. James's Street before the bank is closed."

"Is it Dartnell and Hiscock? Then all right; it is close at hand. Give it to me, and I will see about it at once."

Captain Balfour drew his pocket-book from an inner pocket of his coat, took out the cheque, and placed it unhesitatingly in Tremayne's hand. "Take care of it," he said coolly, "for if lost, you would find it hard to repay it."

Charlie stepped back till he caught a ray of light from the lamp in the gatekeeper's box, when he exclaimed in surprise, "What! two thou', and that from Trevellyan?"

Captain Balfour studied his face intently, to see if he detected anything wrong in the handwriting. "Yes, my dear fellow. When a man goes in largely for horseflesh, the money slips through his fingers like water."

"How close he is! He never mentioned a word of it to me."

"For fear, perhaps, that you might do as he did, and not as he told you."

"When will you call for the tin? I don't like having such a sum of money in my hands. I might be tempted to spend it, you know," he added, with a laugh.

"It's not mine, or I might offer to go shares. What station do you start from for your charming expedition?"

"Victoria. I am going down to Rookwood with Ravenhill by the 5.25."



"Then I will be there by the London, Brighton, and South-Coast cloak-room, at 5.15. Don't mention my name to Lord Ravenhill. Swells are not in my line, nor I in theirs. And, mind, not a word about the cheque to *any one*; it might make mischief." With a little nod, he walked off towards Parliament Street, whilst Charlie turned his face towards the hazy park.

The cheque was cashed without any difficulty; but the clerk who cashed it elevated his eyebrows when he saw the figure, and said, after a scrutinizing glance at the "presenter's" face, "Your name, I believe, is Tremayne?"

"It is. Good afternoon;" and, taking up the money, Charlie walked out.

"Humph! I know him by name and by sight, but I don't know anything else about him," muttered the clerk, as he examined the cheque curiously.

"Brother-in-law to Sir Philip Trevellyan," answered another, who was writing in the background. "Lodges round the corner, Jermyn Street."

"I suppose it's all right, if he is his own brother-in-law; but Sir Philip, the last time he was here, remarked that he had been spending more money than usual, and meant to draw in. A funny way this of drawing in."

"In whose favour is it drawn?"

“Edward Pond.”

“That’s the tailor in Bond Street.”

“Whew! Two thou’ for coats and waist-coats! His bill must have been going on ever since his first Eton jacket.”

“Oh, but Pond doesn’t confine himself to tailoring. I know he sold a horse the other day for a pretty round figure to the Marquis of Kinross.”

“Ah, then, that’s it. Trevellyan has been laying in cattle for next season in London. But anyhow, I will name it to the governor. Time to shut up work, so let us be off.”

Five minutes later the two friends strolled arm-in-arm down St. James’s Street, and the offices of Dartnell and Hiscock were closed to the general public.

Before night every banknote of the two thousand pounds was exchanged into gold, or into other notes, except two five-pound notes which were borrowed by Charlie Tremayne at the last moment, as he had left all his money in the pockets of the trousers which he had worn that afternoon.

The rest of the notes were exchanged in different parts of London by a red-bearded man, who lost no time in going from place to place—east, west, north, and south—until he had got rid of the criminating paper. This done, he

stepped into an empty first-class carriage at Charing Cross Station; and when he got out of the train at Westminster Bridge, his beard had vanished, and his small dark whiskers were as black as his own scarf. Looking over his shoulder to see that he was not watched, he walked rapidly on to the bridge, stooped for an instant over the parapet, let something fall into the dark waters, which looked gloomy enough in the foggy night, and then turned as quickly back again towards the twinkling lights of Parliament Street.

He had given a small shiver when looking down on the mirky river, as a thought flashed through his brain of the many desperate, crime-driven wretches who had sought for peace in its untempting waters. Would he ever come to that?

“Not so long as Kate lives, and I have a chance of winning her,” he answered promptly to his own reflections, and briskly walked away. His mind was fixed on this one object, with the persistency of a monomaniac. It was the Alpha and Omega of his thoughts, the one absorbing aim for which he fashioned his life. In his reckless onward course he could feel no compunction for those who suffered. If evil came to them, it was the curse of fate that one man must suffer for another’s gain. They might

### CASHED.

grumble at destiny, who was so whimsically partial in dispensing her favours, that the success of A must mean the failure of B. As in a game of whist, one side could not win without the other side losing, so was it in life; the losers make their moan, and wait till their luck turns.

There was no use in grumbling; it was a hard world at the best, and that man was a fool who, when his chance came, did not seize it with both hands. Scruples were out of place, and hesitation was the forerunner of defeat; the only way to succeed was to press on, and not be too particular as to the things you trampled underfoot.

Fate seemed to have singled out Charlie Tremayne to be the scapegoat. Even now, he had in his pocket sufficient evidence against him to bring him to the dock. Balfour frowned as he thought of it. If it came to that, what was to be his course of action? It would be a terrible position for any man to face—his beloved in one scale, his friend in the other! He threw back his head impatiently. When the time came, if come it must, then would be the moment for decision.

He had not walked deliberately into guilt, but rather had taken a sudden header into sin. It was still doubtful how soon he would rise to

the surface, if rise he must; for to some natures it is more easy to sink, than to swim.

A game at cards, he thought, would be the very thing to brace his nerves; so he walked down Pall Mall, up a narrow street, and knocked at the door of a dark, reserved-looking house. On being admitted he went upstairs to a large room, brilliantly lighted as usual, but the brightness of the gas was somewhat obscured by the fog, which still pervaded the atmosphere. It was not long before he found a retired table and a rich young squire, both of them ready for a game of *écarté*.

Angus Balfour, though a persistent player, had rarely been encouraged by success. As a general rule, his scanty coins swelled the perhaps already swollen pockets of his opponent; but to-nigh the luck changed. Three times in succession he marked the king. The deal passed backwards and forwards, but fresh cards only brought the same result. A crowd of men gathered round the little table, and backed either player with keen interest. Mr. Ashton, the country squire, raised the stakes in the frantic hope of retrieving his losses, but with no other result than to increase Captain Balfour's winnings. Disgusted at reiterated failure, the young man lost his head and played wildly; but his partner's cheek never flushed. Cool

and composed in victory, as he had often been in defeat, he won with the utmost *sang-froid*, and was the first to propose giving up. This was energetically resisted by the loser, and they continued to play with the same result in the great majority of the games. It seemed as impossible for Mr. Ashton to win two games in succession, as for a doomed man in Russia to live. After a time he grew sulky, and looked up with an angry scowl at the cold face opposite to him. To his excited imagination, Balfour's eyes seemed to scintillate with a Medusa-like stare.

"There is something uncanny in the fellow ; I don't like him," he said to himself, as he gathered up his cards again with an impatient grunt.

He knew it was bad form to show temper, so he did his best to suppress it, and wrote his I.O.U. with a good grace when the game was over. Captain Balfour took the paper from his hand, with a careless "Thank you ;" yet, with all his studied coolness, he could not refrain from giving a start on seeing the amount of his gains. Was it by a special sarcasm of fate that the sum amounted so exactly to two thousand pounds ?

He took off his hat when he found himself outside in the misty street, for, in spite of a cold exterior, his brain was on fire. Why was it that

he had lost persistently for night after night, and only won to-day, just when it was too late? Had it only come last week, he might have claimed his bride with unsoiled hands. Regret was useless—a weakness only fit for women and old men; so he hurried on, determined not to look back till his goal was won.

Wherever the wind might come from that filled his sails, “*Vogue la galère*” was his only cry, and Kate his only thought.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### SOME ONE AT THE DOOR.

It was a few days after his dinner at Rookwood, and Charlie Tremayne was sitting in his comfortable room, partaking of a late breakfast, when a visitor was announced. Tremayne looked from the card which had been placed in his hand, to the elderly man who was advancing slowly towards him.

The visitor, a man of average height, greyish hair, and passably good looks, with projecting forehead, keen eyes, and bristling whiskers, bowed with the brisk air of a man of business, and waited for Tremayne to speak.

“ Mr. Muggins ? ” said Charlie, hesitatingly.

“ At your service ”—with another bow. “ I come on the part of Messrs. Hiscock and Co. The name of the firm must naturally be familiar to you.”

“ Oh, certainly. Take a seat.” ( “ What the deuce has he come about ? That blessed cheque,



I suppose. I mustn't forget that, for some reason of his own, Balfour said I was not to breathe a word about it," was Charlie's private reflection as he resumed his chair, and looked regretfully at the fried kidneys which were rapidly growing cold.)

Mr. Muggins seemed to interpret his thoughts, for his first words were, "Pray don't let me interrupt your breakfast; we men of business are terribly early risers, and are apt to forget that the other half of society sleep in the morning, and are awake all night."

"Mayn't I offer you something yourself? A glass of sherry, or a brandy and soda?"

"Not at this hour, thank you," drawing himself up stiffly, as if shocked at the idea. "I called upon a small matter of business connected with this cheque," which he exhibited, but firmly retained in his hand. "I observe that it is endorsed by Edward Pond; and as you presented it, I presume I am right in concluding that you had it direct from that person?"

Charlie looked up in surprise, and met Mr. Muggins' scrutinizing eyes fixed upon his face. He coloured, as was his frequent habit when encountering a stare, but answered readily enough, "Mr. Pond—I don't know him!"

"Indeed"—very drily. "Then may I ask how it came into your hands?"

"I am very sorry, but I can't tell you," said Charlie, haughtily.

There was a pause. Mr. Muggins appeared to reflect before he spoke again. When he did, his tone was particularly suave. "You speak as if you thought it was no concern of mine. I need only say that if there is anything wrong with this cheque it may lead to very serious consequences, in which the interests of my clients will be involved."

"I had no idea of that ; " and he pushed away his plate.

"I am sure of it ; and as the solicitor to Messrs. Drayton and Hiscock's firm, you will see that I am not going beyond the range of my duty in this matter. This cheque being to the order of Edward Pond, I must press you to give a plain answer to a plain question. It bears no other name than Mr. Pond ; and, if a genuine cheque, it must once have been his property, and no one else had a right to endorse it. And yet you say you don't know Mr. Pond, while you refuse to tell me from whom you received it. Can you wonder at my pressing for an explanation ? "

"Not at all. But I have no knowledge of Mr. Pond. I don't know who he is."

"Presumably the tailor in Bond St."

"Or a horse-dealer, I should think, of the same name."

"Why do you think so?" and the solicitor's sharp eyes fastened on him like a terrier's.

"Oh, I don't know; it seems more natural," he said confusedly, remembering Balfour's hints.

"More natural to spend two thousand pounds on horses, than on coats and trousers? It seems so, on the face of it; but have you any grounds for the remark?"

"Well, I fancy Sir Philip spends a good deal in that way;" and he drummed impatiently on the table.

"Do you know of any horse-dealer named Pond?"

"No, indeed. I have no money of my own to spend on horses, and I am not acquainted with the dealers."

"Anyhow, you confess that whether this Mr. Pond be a dealer or a tailor, it was not from his hands that you received the cheque?"

"I have told you so already."

"Then how do you account for its possession?" and suddenly wheeling round, Mr. Muggins looked him straight in the face.

"I don't wish to account for it. The money was not mine, or I would tell you about it at once."

"You mean to say that it was not for yourself you cashed it?"—with a look of surprise.

"I wish it had been."

"And you never touched a farthing of the money?"

"Not a farthing," said Charlie, utterly oblivious of the ten pounds which he had borrowed from Balfour, and not yet repaid.

Mr. Muggins turned away in disgust. One of the notes had already been traced to Tremayne, and yet he could look as honest as the day whilst declaring that he had not touched the money. The young fellow's innocent face had nearly taken him in, but after this bare-faced lie he could now believe him capable even of a forgery.

"Then I will wish you good morning;" and, rising from his seat, he bowed stiffly to Tremayne.

"I wish you could wait till to-morrow," began Charlie, impulsively.

"Why?"

"Because then I should be able to tell you all about it."

"Oh!"—with a slight cough. ("I see; the sly dog means to give us the slip.")

"Good morning. So sorry I could not be more explicit."

"And so am I," came from half-way down the staircase.

Mr. Muggins turned into St. James's Street, and entering the bank by the private door,

informed Mr. Drayton of the result of the interview. This result, coupled with the telegram received from Sir Philip Trevellyan in answer to his own, in which the baronet denied all knowledge of the cheque in question, left the banker no alternative, as his solicitor lost no time in telling him. Proceedings must be instituted against the presenter, and that without delay.

Charlie Tremayne, meanwhile, rather disturbed in his mind, sat down to write a letter to his friend.

“DEAR BALFOUR,

“There is some mucker about that cheque you wanted me to cash. Pray come up, and set things straight *at once*; for an old fellow has been here questioning me like a pickpocket. I have kept your name dark at present.

“Yours ever,

“CHARLES TREMAYNE.

“Captain Balfour,

“Kempstone Barracks, Bedford.”

Having placed this note in an envelope, which he stamped and directed, he posted it on his way to the Foreign Office. “I shall hear from him to-morrow, at latest,” he said confidently to himself, as he dropped it into the box; “and never again will I undertake to cash

any other man's cheque. That old curmudgeon looked at me as if I were a swindler. Wonder what's at the bottom of it? If it were any one else than Balfour, I should think there was something fishy."

Strong in his loyalty to his friend, he walked on without a doubt, much puzzled, it is true, but not dismayed, trusting to to-morrow to put himself right with the banker, and clear the name of Tremayne from the slightest taint of suspicion. Being a little more serious than usual, he got through his work better, smoked fewer cigarettes, and talked less nonsense. As he sat with his pen in his hand, he thought of that day, so many years ago, when he had entreated Flora to marry a rich man for the sake of getting him on in the world. He was ashamed to remember it now—the utter selfishness on his own part, the grand generosity on hers. And what had come of it? Disappointment. The progress he had made was nothing wonderful; the sacrifice that she had made was patent to all who could look below the winning smile to the sad heart within. Where were Trevellyan's eyes, that he could tire of the loveliest face that Nature ever formed, and find attractions in the charms of other women, no more to be compared with hers, than gaslight with the sun? It was a mystery to her brother; but he

had yet to learn that the rose that is gathered is less valued than those which remain on the tree. He was too young as yet to know that enjoyment brings satiety, and that the thing they have is never so nice to some people, as the thing beyond their reach.

So he chafed at Trevellyan's neglect in silent wonder, feeling the matter too deeply to name it to a soul. Even Balfour had never heard a word about it, and always thought from hearsay that Tremayne's sister was one of the most fortunate of women. He had never seen her, or he might have been struck by a certain resemblance between the stately Lady Trevellyan and his own fawn-eyed Kate. Flora was taller by several inches, her complexion fairer, and her hair more golden; but, nevertheless, the likeness was strong. Each had the same wistful eyes, fringed with dark lashes; and each had the same peculiar grace in the turn of her slender neck. There was not the slightest relationship between the two, so the likeness was only a caprice of Nature; but it was strong enough for Charlie to notice it at once when he met Miss Ward at Burlington House, and was introduced to her by Balfour.

He was thinking of it as he filled in a register; thinking that it would be a good thing to strike up a friendship with the future Mrs.

Balfour, in order to have the pleasure of looking at a face which could recall his absent sister.

"Come and dine with us to-night, Tremayne," said Vivian, slapping him on the shoulder. "Only a humdrum affair, with my mother and sisters—as slow as possible."

"I should like it immensely;" and Charlie's face brightened. "A pleasant evening like that is worth a dozen dinner-parties."

"All right; we shall expect you at eight. Don't be late." With a nod, Vivian walked out of the room.

Charlie went home soon afterwards, pleased at the thought of a sociable evening to be spent in a cheerful family circle. He envied every man who had a real home to go to, instead of a dreary lodging, and a mother and sister to welcome him, instead of an empty chair.

As he tied his small white tie with great precision, smoothed his fair hair with extra care, settled his coat in its place, and pinned a tiny bunch of violets in his button-hole, he was wondering if there was a chance of meeting pretty Rose Dynevor, his great ally, at her aunt's dinner-table. One more look in the glass; and then, after a pleased smile at the good-looking reflection, which seemed fascinating enough to soften the heart of any girl of nineteen, he ran downstairs, took his ulster from



the hook, put it on, opened the door, and—stopped short.

A policeman was standing on the step, about to knock. As Charlie appeared in the doorway, he stepped forward. "Is your name Charles Tremayne?"

"It is. But what is that to you?"

"Then it is my duty, sir, to take you into custody on a charge of forgery;" and he put his hand roughly on his shoulder.

The poor fellow threw it off indignantly. "There's some mistake."

"You had better come with me quietly. I've got a cab at the door."

"But where? What is it? I don't understand!" and he looked round with dazed eyes.

"You'll understand fast enough by-and-bye," said the man surlily, as he tried to urge him on to the step.

"But I won't go. I know nothing about it!" and, in futile resistance, he set his back firmly against the wall.

"You'd have me force ye, would ye? I've handcuffs with me, and another man round the corner; but I don't mean to use either of 'em, unless I'm obliged. You wouldn't like to let the whole street into your secrets?"

"I have no secrets," said Tremayne, stoutly, his eyes flashing.

"Oh, good Lord! what's the matter?" and Mrs. Lloyd, the mistress of the lodgings, ran into the passage with uplifted hands. "Oh mercy, mercy me! that the perlice should have come into my house! I'm a ruined woman if any one hears of it!"

"Mrs. Lloyd!" cried Charlie, who was a special favourite of the soft-hearted woman, "he wants to carry me off on a ridiculous charge, and I refuse to go."

The landlady looked from one to the other, with a bewildered air and watery eyes. The policeman stooped to whisper something in her ear. She shook her head vehemently in answer, and then turned to Charlie.

"It's no moral use going against the law, sir."

"But I am innocent!"

"Bless your heart! I know you are," she exclaimed in good-hearted contempt. "No use to tell me you are not, for I could take my Bible oath to it; I could. But you must go with him, my poor lamb; and you will only get out all the sooner."

Tremayne's chest heaved with an indignant sob. Mrs. Lloyd, whimpering like an afflicted dog, seized his hand and wrung it in both her own.

"And if they keep you, my poor innocent,"

she cried hysterically, "you shan't be forgot. I'll come and look after you, to see you are not starved—that I will!"

Charlie nodded; he could not speak; shame and indignation had well-nigh overmastered him. Followed by the policeman, he took his place in the cab, the door slammed, they drove off at a good pace, and left Mrs. Lloyd standing on the doorstep like a very Niobe dissolved in ears.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### TREACHERY.

"MR. TREMAYNE in?" asked Captain Balfour, three minutes after he had seen the said Tremayne carried off in a cab by two policemen.

"No, sir," said Mrs. Lloyd, who, in consequence of the exciting events of the evening, answered the door herself. "But come in, if you please. The most awful thing has happened. I call it a judgment of Providence on the innocent, instead of the guilty."

As soon as Captain Balfour had stepped inside, she shut the door behind him, and told him in a mysterious whisper what had just occurred.

He shook his head with an air of the greatest concern. "Poor fellow! He was always a little wild."

"But bless your heart, sir, he hasn't done it no more nor me, myself. I could take my affidavit to it, if I was on my dying bed."

"Of course, of course; and so could I. Did they search his room?"

"No, he didn't; but he seemed a young man fresh to the job. I think he thought more of not making a fuss than of the business in hand. But if there's anything in the charge, they will come back, in course, for evidence to support it, and I was thinking, as you are such a friend of the young gentleman's"—her voice dropped so low that his eager ears could scarcely catch the words—"maybe you would like to step upstairs, and see that he left no damaging papers about; for they are that sharp they would make some mischief out of a billydoo."

His dark eyes gleamed. Was it fiend or angel that put every opportunity he wished for into his grasp? "If I do, you will keep it dark?"

"I'll lock the door as soon as ever you come out, and stand on the landing whilst you are inside to keep Mary Ann from spying." So saying she led the way upstairs, with her finger to her lips, as if by means of it she made the two pairs of footsteps inaudible.

Alone in Charlie's room, with tokens of his recent presence on every side—the open cigarette box, from which he had just filled his case, the glass of water in which the flower for the young dandy's button-hole had rested, the boots which he had discarded for his evening pumps, the

novel which he had thrown face downward on the floor. For one minute Captain Balfour stood irresolute, as the past years of friendship rose up in accusation against him. It was not a trifle that could make him falter. He knew that on the issue of the next ten minutes hung the salvation of his soul. After this one deed of execrable treachery, there would be no going back to the paths of honest rectitude. He would have sunk as low as the meanest reptile that ever crawled. Hitherto he had been supported by a feeling that it was one man against the world; now it was one man against another, and that other the one friend who had stuck by him through good report and ill, with more than a brother's love.

"Is thy servant a dog; that he should do this thing?" The indignant protest of the Assyrian came into his mind. Hazael's soul revolted at the prophesied treason, but he sinned none the less readily when the time came. And so would he; he knew it, even as he stood there in seeming indecision. The hesitation was the outward protest of outraged manhood before it yielded. His head sank on his breast. For ever and for ever he must cringe and stoop mentally before the eye of an honest man, and before the eye of his inner self, lost in self-conscious shame. Even a murderer might shrink from him, and

deem this shabby crime worse than a bold deed of blood. He saw the depth of wickedness before him, but the power to turn back was no longer his. He must go on to destruction like Mazeppa. Bound to his sins, as the Cossack to his wild horses, he must face the consequences in his headlong career, and surmount every obstacle that lay across his path. Kate was the prize; and the sin that lay between them, no matter how broad or how deep, could not take the winning look from her eyes, or destroy the ineffable charm of her kisses.

Drawing a deep breath, he picked up a bunch of keys which was lying on the table, and approached the ink-stained desk, last relic of Charlie's days at Eton. Having opened it without difficulty, he proceeded to turn over its contents with a hasty hand. Scented, bemonogrammed envelopes he tossed aside with a contemptuous smile. . He had never cared to cherish any letters but Kate's, and had no sympathy with the many loves of others. Presently he found what he wanted—a packet of letters addressed to Charlie in Lady Trevellyan's hand. These he placed in his pocket, with the muttered reflection, "If the worst comes to the worst, I shall have to use them," and took out of it two or three sheets of paper, on which he had tried to imitate Sir Philip's writing in the

words, "Edward Pond—two thousand pounds," and the baronet's own signature. After repeated attempts the last had been so successful, that comparing it with that of a short note from Trevellyan, which was lying in the desk, he could scarcely detect any difference. There was also another sheet of paper with the controverted signature of Edward Pond, copied from a bill, which he had picked up in the rooms of a brother officer, named Whittaker. All these papers he placed in the desk. As he did so, there was a slight noise at the door. He turned quickly, saw nothing, shut down the lid in a hurry, locked it, and hid the key under the hearthrug to give an appearance of intended secrecy. Taking up some circulars which were of no value, either to their owner or any one else, he threw them into the fire. This done, he walked hastily across the room, as if the place were hateful to him, and with a stealthy hand opened the door, and peeped out. His face, as he did so, was white as his own shirt-collar, and great beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead. He had not felt so degraded when actually forging the cheque, as now, when he was deliberately planning the ruin of his friend. The deed was hideous to him, but it had to be done, as his own safety depended upon its performance.



Mrs. Lloyd had not deserted her post on the landing. "It's all right, sir. I have sent the girl out on an errand, and she hasn't the least idea that there is any one but myself in the house"—in an agitated whisper.

"That is well;" and Balfour gave an approving nod. "There were a few papers which I thought were better out of the way, so I burnt them." In proof of what he said, he pointed to the ashes in the grate. "The rest I have left just as I found them, so the police will find nothing to repay them for their trouble. Mind, not a word, or you may get yourself and Mr. Tremayne into trouble."

Then he ran downstairs and let himself out, after a hurried glance up and down the street. The coast was clear, so he went on his way through the frosty night. Now that the decisive step was taken, he felt easier; for nothing irritated him so much as indecision, and remorse had not yet taken its perch on his shoulder. He was engaged in a desperate game, and the slightest false step would be ruin; for let the smallest hint of his complicity in a discreditable transaction get to Mr. Ward's ears, and he would be only too delighted to seize upon it, as a pretext for cancelling his daughter's engagement. That two thousand won from the young squire was a lucky haul, for it supplied

him with the requisite funds, and with a safe answer, supposing questions were asked as to his sudden increase of fortune. He could go to the solicitor with a clear conscience as to this particular item, claim his promise, and walk off with his daughter. Even if he had to promise never to touch a card again, it would not be much of a sacrifice. Cards were a welcome distraction when thought was unpleasant, and home hateful; but with Kate, the gloomiest lodging would be a bower of bliss, and nothing hateful but that which took him from her presence.

There was something to be done before he returned to Bedford—to see Charlie Tremayne, and put the screw on, if necessary. Hardened as he was, he shrank from the thought of it. The young fellow would naturally turn restive, and then——

He quickened his pace; and, as soon as he had reached his Bloomsbury lodging and locked the door, pulled Flora Trevellyan's letters out of his pocket. He examined them one after the other, reading with callous attention the loving words in which this woman, whom he had never seen, addressed her brother. Such tenderness as this in a leader of fashion, whose beauty was the theme for tongue and pen in other lands beside her own, surprised him. With a gesture

of disgust he threw them down, and leant his head upon his hand. Could it be he, Angus Balfour, who was about to do this execrable deed? His thoughts went back to the very beginning of his life, when his heart was fresh as a newly blown primrose, and his dreams as pure as its fragrance.

In years long gone by, his father had run away with Lady Muriel Broadbent, Lady Jemima's younger sister, whom he loved with all the passion of a wild, undisciplined nature. Having decoyed her from home on a false pretence, he whirled her off in a post-chaise and four, without allowing one moment for reflection, led her, frightened and fainting, to the altar, kissed her passionately when the ceremony was over, and thought to conquer her love by the vigour of his own. Finding that neither soft words nor tender caresses had any effect but that of making him more repulsive, he wrapped himself in a mantle of sternness, and slowly broke her heart.

Of all the young fellows who had filled her old home with life and noise, George Balfour, as Lady Jemima truly said, was "the fiercest and wildest of the lot." He had picked a quarrel with Lionel Vivian because she gave him a rose which he wanted for himself; and a day or two later, left him lying on the moor,

shot through the breast with Muriel's name on his quivering lips. Banished by his own act from the house which had been his favourite, he plunged into dissipation, without the smallest heed for appearances. Utterly reckless after her death, he finally married a gipsy, and set up house in London. Finding that his friends fought shy of him, he grew tired of his wife, cursed her for being the reason for their neglect, and troubled his home only occasionally. Angus was the sole offspring of this unhappy union. Father and mother quarrelled over his handsome, curly head; and the boy, disgusted with domestic strife, ran away and joined his mother's tribe in the west of England. Under their tents he was taught amongst other things that a man must depend upon his wits, if he means to get on, and that the property of the rich, having been confiscated from its rightful owners—the poor—the latter were perfectly justified in appropriating it whenever it was possible. Acting on this principle, he stole Sir Philip's cheque, and applying it to attributes as well as effects, he stole Charles Tremayne's innocence, and wrapped himself in it as in a garment. His father claimed him before his education in vice was finished, sent him to school, and finally allowed him to follow the natural bent of his inclinations, and go into the army. Both Mr.

and Mrs. Balfour died almost as soon as he had obtained his commission, and he was left to fight his struggle with the world single-handed.

He had not been especially successful at the beginning of our story, and we have yet to learn how he will end. At present the outlook is not promising, as he sits with his pen in his hand, and Flora Trevellyan's letters scattered on the table before him. If it had not been for Kate's fawn-like eyes, he would have thrown up his cards, and cast in his lot with his mother's kindred. As it was, the love, which was the best part of him, by the adverse circumstances of his life, dragged him ever lower and lower in the scale of degradation. If he carried out the thought which was growing like a fungus in his mind, there would be no lower depth for a degraded wretch to reach. If he resisted it, sure detection would be his; and the prize for which he had staked his soul would escape from his grasp for ever. The temptation was strong with the strength of man's desire. There was no power on earth which could fortify his heart against it; and Heaven, he had lost the habit of invoking to his aid. It was easy to guess how the strife would end.

The pale-eyed dawn, looking through the cracks of the shutter, found Captain Balfour still

seated at the table, his pen in his hand and sheets of foreign notepaper lying in confusion around him ; whilst beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, though the room was cold and the fire long since out.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## FACE TO FACE.

"WELL, you see, old fellow, I have come to look you up as soon as I could. I hope you won't find it as difficult to get out, as I did to get in;" and Captain Balfour threw his hat down on the table with an air of careless ease, affected to hide the real constraint of his feelings. It was a miserable, depressing room, with little light and small comfort; and Charlie Tremayne looked already much the worse for his involuntary sojourn in Marlborough Street. "It's the last visit I shall be able to pay you, as after to-day they have stopped all further leave."

"In that case, they will have to prolong it, for you are rather too important a witness to let slip," said Tremayne, leaning his head on his hand, and looking his whilom friend, with whom he had not attempted to shake hands, straight in the face.

Balfour's white face grew whiter still.

"Good God! you don't think I am going to run my head into the noose! What would Mr. Ward say? Think of Kate!"

"It is a pity you did not think of this before," said Charlie, drily, his fair cheek flushing slightly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean before you did—*what you have done.*"

"I don't understand you;" and he tossed back his head, with an attempt at haughty defiance. "I give you ~~a~~ cheque to cash in all good faith, and because you have a bother about it, you turn against me like this!"

"A *bother*—to be taken up for a forger and a thief!"

"Nonsense; there is some absurd mistake about it. Sir Philip never could have given me a forged cheque."

"Not exactly"—with a sarcastic smile, which sat ill on his pretty, girlish mouth. "A man does not forge his own writing, or steal his own money."

"But somebody has, and, as the song says"—and he laughed unsteadily—"that's not me, nor you."

"Not me, certainly. It is no use humbugging, Balfour. I didn't understand it at first, but now it is as clear as the day. There



is nothing like solitary confinement for enabling you to collect your thoughts. I know that you were terribly in want of the money."

"Ah! and because I have been fool enough to open my heart to you, you reward me——"

"It isn't my fault. I would have beggared myself of my last halfpenny to save you from it."

"Talk! all talk! I thought you were my friend—the only friend I had in the world; but still a true one."

"Don't!" and Charlie winced, as if in pain.

"You needn't be afraid. I shan't talk of it again. If you can suspect me——"

"Balfour, you know you did it!" and, starting to his feet, Charlie confronted him with flashing eyes.

For a moment, Balfour met them undauntedly; and then his lids drooped, and he bent his head in overwhelming shame. He could have faced a judge and jury better than the eyes of the man who had trusted him.

With a sound like a sob, Charlie turned away. There was a pause; and then, sinking back into his chair, he asked hoarsely, "What is to be done?"

"If you expose me," said Balfour, slowly, "not only do you ruin me for life—that is nothing—but you break the heart of an innocent girl;" and he breathed hard as he leant against

the wall, the very attitude showing by its abandonment that his power of self-assertion was gone.

"I know; I see it all."

"You don't understand the resistless force of the temptation. I had been waiting for years and years, watching the months go by, and never a bit nearer when I came to the end of them, longing, as *you* never longed for anything in your life, hoping till hope became madness, and I was scarcely master of myself, scarcely conscious of what I was doing, when I saw the cheque near me, and knew that it was the price I must pay for Kate. No man can answer for himself till he is tried. You might have failed, as I did. I have gone over it again and again in my mind; and by —— I know I should do it again, if it was the only way to win her!" His flow of words stopped, but his eyes still glowed with a sullen fire.

Charlie was deeply moved. "If it had been anything else but this"—and he shivered—"I would have taken it on myself so gladly. It isn't the penalty I'm thinking of, but the loathsome disgrace. Fancy the fellows at the office scouting my name! Fancy my poor sister! it would be the death of her."

"She need not know it," said Balfour, quickly. "It would all be hushed up; Sir

Philip would never prosecute his own brother-in-law."

"Philip? No; but the bank would. It is Drayton and Hiscock who are doing it now."

This possibility had never struck Balfour; it seemed to crush him. All through he had been buoyed up with the idea that if Charlie could be induced to take the crime on himself, there would be no chance of his incurring the penalties of the law. Sir Philip for his own sake, if not for his wife's, would certainly refrain from a prosecution which would advertise his brother-in-law's guilt to the world. Utterly confounded, he stumbled back against the wall with a groan; penal servitude, with all its attendant horrors, passing very distinctly before his eyes.

"So you thought I could be the scapegoat, and yet go unpunished?" said Charlie, after a pause. "That explains matters a little, though the disgrace would have been the same."

"I have thought of a plan," said Balfour, rousing himself. "They would let you out on bail, of course. I would furnish one-half, and Ward should produce the other, and then—you could give them the slip. I would indemnify Ward, and——"

"*Thank* you!" said Tremayne, his voice trembling with indignant scorn. "*You* may forget that there is such a thing as honour; but,

thank God, I remember it still !” His nostrils quivered, and he grasped the table with nervous fingers.

A long silence, whilst one man slowly ate the bread of humiliation to its last crumb ; and the other dumbly wondered if he should wake soon from this horrible nightmare, which had turned his friend into the lowest scoundrel that had ever lived. It *must* be some delusion, for he had believed in him with the unquestioning faith of boyhood, ripening into the steadfast friendship of years. He had been loyal to him, in spite of hints and warnings on every side, never doubting that the ill reports which gathered round him were the offspring of some enemy’s malice. Had he been a fool all the time never to see what seemed patent to every one else, or was there some gross mistake somewhere ? Sick at heart, he looked round at Balfour, as if to gather comfort from the mere sight of his well-known features. Rigid in its stern beauty, it might have been the face of a corpse, except for the sullen light in its dark eyes.

“ If you would be a little more practical, and a little less romantic, you would see that there would be no dishonour in refusing to answer to a false charge,” he said slowly. “ But let that be ; if you prefer to stand your trial, you can,

and I will see that counsel are engaged for your defence."

"You are very kind; but I prefer to be discharged without a trial at all."

"But that you can't be"—very quietly, though his heart beat rapidly, and every pulse throbbed with carefully concealed emotion.

"That I *can*!" cried Charlie, once more roused to indignation. "One word from me, and you step into the dock, and I step out."

"But that word must *not* be spoken. No harm can happen to you. Look at it, dispassionately. You have nothing to do but to plead 'Not guilty' and hold your tongue. There is so little evidence to support the charge, that no magistrate would dare to commit you for trial."

"And supposing I did get off scot free, I should be disgraced for life."

"Not at all. An acquittal would clear your name," he affirmed, though he knew it to be false. "And you have friends enough to back you up, and spread the right story through the clubs."

"But somebody must be guilty; if they couldn't fix it upon you, they would upon me."

"They would try to, and they would fail."

Charlie shook his head. "I don't see it. I know nothing about the law, it is true; but any one, except a fool, can see that if you are found

with a forged cheque in your hand, and your tongue is tied so that you can't account for its possession, you stand a very good chance of being taken for a forger and a thief."

Balfour's face grew even whiter than before. "Make it as unpleasant for me as you can," he said, with a scowl. "It is so brave to kick a man when he is down."

"By Jove! Balfour, that is rather hard. You know that I would have stood by you through thick and thin"—and his face flushed hotly—"and I will do so still, for old friendship's sake, if you will only tell me how."

"And yet you shrink from a temporary inconvenience like this. I tell you how, but you won't do it. The charge will be harmless to you, fatal to me. If it is brought against me"—he made a step nearer, and his voice vibrated with emotion—"I shall be lost in this world, and the next as well. It will break Kate's heart; and then nothing in earth or heaven could save me from going to the devil."

Charlie saw the depth of passion glowing in his eyes, and knew that it was no idle rhodomontade, but simple, horrible truth.

"I don't ask you to think of *me*; what I have done in a moment of madness will stand between us to the end of our lives. You shake your head now; but you refused to touch my

hand when I came in. Very natural"—with a sneer; "people are so virtuous, till they are tempted. But think of Kate"—and his voice softened—"think of her, with her gentle, loving heart, and tender, unselfish ways; think of her pretty face, and the look on it which seems borrowed from heaven; think of her love for me, which has grown with her growth, till it has become part and parcel of her being. If you kill it, you kill her; and the death of the sweetest, loveliest girl in England will lie at your door."

Charlie buried his face on his arms, and writhed as if in pain. "Look here, Balfour"—and there were tears in his eyes as he raised his head—"if I were alone in the world, I would do it for you—I would, upon my word. But I *daren't*; it would break my sister's heart."

A change came over Captain Balfour's face, which had flushed for a moment with the passion of his appeal. "And supposing it were to save your sister's honour instead of mine, would you do it then?"

"Yes, by Heaven I would."

"Then do it;" and he folded his arms with a gesture of triumph.

Tremayne started up, his eyes fixed in a wild stare. "Flora! who dares to mix her up with anything dishonourable?"

Balfour smiled. "No one but the lady herself."

"It's a lie! and I defy you to prove it!"

"A lie!" and his eyes blazed.

"Yes; a base, miserable, cowardly lie, only fit for the mouth of a forger and a thief!" cried Charlie, beside himself with rage.

Captain Balfour drew himself up, and set his teeth. Every atom of compunction for the poor young fellow whom he was goading to destruction having died at the sound of those epithets, which rung in his head from morning till night.

"Prove it, I say, if you can!"

"I can, as soon as you are composed enough to listen;" and his voice sounded cold as ice in comparison with the fire of the other's tones. Stepping forward, he drew a packet of letters from his pocket, one of which he selected and placed upon the table, with his hand over it. "About five or six years ago you boasted that Miss Tremayne had sacrificed herself for your sake, and thrown over the poor man whom she loved, for the rich man whom she liked."

"I had no business to mention it, if she did;" and Charlie bit his lip.

"Perhaps not; but in those days you may remember that we were like brothers, and there was not anything that concerned you that I didn't know. I thought it the most wonderful



example of fraternal affection that I ever heard of, and wondered if the lover were really discarded, or the husband only taken as a blind. Don't speak. You had better hear me to the end; it will save trouble. A year or two ago, you may remember that Basil Fitz-herbert's luggage was robbed by some gipsies, who were loitering about the E—— Station in hopes of a job. The thieves took the most valuable things, and threw the empty bag over a hedge. These letters, as being of no use, were dropped on the high-road, where I chanced to pick them up. They have remained in my possession ever since. I had a slight grudge against Ravenhill, and it amused me to see his daily advertisement for the rest of the contents of the bag, knowing that he had got back everything else—for the gipsies were caught—except these, which he probably valued more than all the others put together."

"I remember about the bag; but I don't see what all this has got to do with Flora," said Charlie, waxing impatient.

"Possibly you may, when I tell you that these letters are hers, *hers*—Lady Trevellyan's," he insisted, "addressed to her lover."

Charlie sprang from his seat, and tried to hit him on the mouth; but Captain Balfour stepped back.

"Violence won't help you," he said disdainfully. "Read that, and judge for yourself," and he pushed the letter, which he had kept under his hand, across the table.

Charlie clutched at it eagerly; but, as he read, his heart went down into his boots. Surely the hand was that of Flora, but the words—*could* they have been penned by the purest woman on earth? "Where are the others? Let me see them," he said hoarsely.

"Give me your word that you won't destroy them," said Balfour distrustfully.

"On my honour as a gentleman."

The letters were handed over, and read with wondering eyes, and a growing feeling of sickness about the heart.

"They are forgeries—the most impudent forgeries in the world," he said, throwing them down in disgust, much as Chastelar, if he had lived, might have flung down the celebrated letters of Mary Stuart.

"Then why did Fitz-herbert advertise for them?" asked Balfour, with a sneer.

"I don't know. The whole world seems going topsy-turvy. What are you going to do with them? You ought to have given them up long ago. I suppose you kept them for a purpose?"

"You are right. For your sake I have held

my hand ; but," and his voice grew slowly emphatic, "if my name gets mixed up in this trial, I shall be ruined ; and a desperate man cares for nothing but revenge."

"Revenge on whom ? Flora never wronged a creature in her life."

"On you, for bringing me to this pass ; and on Ravenhill, for the old grudge I told you of."

"And you would ruin the happiness of a woman's life for such paltry reasons as these ? "

"Paltry or not, they are enough for me."

"And what do you propose to do with these letters ? "

"Send them to Trevellyan by the first post. Report says he is careless about his own duties, but strict about his wife's."

"Report, for a wonder, speaks truth. Supposing Philip turned her out of his house, would that add to your happiness by one iota ? "

"No ; but it wouldn't increase my misery."

"And you, whom I always have taken for a gentleman," and the poor fellow's breast swelled with scorn, "you hold this over me as a threat ? "

"I do. A drowning man is not particular as to the thing he grasps at."

"And if I don't take your dastardly crime upon myself, my sister is to be dragged through the filth of shame ? "

“Exactly. It is in self-defence I do it.”

“Then go!” and he pointed to the door, with a gesture of boundless contempt, “and may the scorn of every honest man pursue you to the last day of your life!”

Captain Balfour’s face was livid, but not knowing if he had gained his point or not, he refused to stir. “Is my name to be mentioned or not?” he said coldly.

“No, it shall be sunk in the oblivion which cowards delight in. Go!”

He picked up his hat and the letters, and went. When the door closed upon him, Charlie Tremayne, spent with passion, buried his face on the table, and sobbed aloud.

For Flora’s sake—a felon!

END OF VOL. I.

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